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CREATIVE-COMMUNICATIONAL TRANSITIONS AND SELF-AWARENESS RECONSTRUCTION BY ARCHITECTURAL STUDENTS IN AN ACADEMIC CONTEXT



Natacha Drobnyak Touati

RESEARCH SETTING:

In the empirical context of the program within the *Expression Plastique Studio* at *The National School of Architecture and Urbanism of Tunis*, like a microcosm of its own, the future architects indirectly initiate the spreading of the field of "agreed consent and freedom" (Mannheim, 2009, p. 69) in order to increase focusing on their own creative communicational transitions, by activating questions on creative communicational transitions of the environments they communicate with (academic, generational, cultural, professional, private, etc.).

We conclude that creative transitions, as models of learning, carry a disposition for deep level changes of self-awareness reconstruction of the members of a society, thus reviving a vocabulary of authenticity and selfness.

ABSTRACT

This paper points to the interrelation of autonomous research of conceptual propositions of cultural eventfulness of architectural students and the cathartic eventfulness of the same students while producing a specific pedagogical ambience of public/personal, which is to be homogenized by the two arts lecturers on the spot. This research evaluates transitional relations between catharsis, cultural concept and communication in the context of the Expression Plastique Studio, as an academic active Space, which in many aspects questions the creative-plastic reflection of the architectural students between non-market and market values.

KEYWORDS : *student of architecture, Expression Plastique Studio, cathartic derivatives, creative transitions, conceptual capital.*

SHORT PROFILE

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pedagogical orientation is a multi-dimensional supplement of the student's professional personality for the distribution of those forms, spaces and environments, which could, both locally and globally, enable creative exchange for the members of the society. The pedagogical process selected intensifies the creative questioning of the architectural students with

1. INTRODUCTION

"Emotional boundaries in the world have become equally important as the geographical ones. Soon the creation of emotional maps will become equally legitimate and mandatory as the creation of cartographic representations of geographic realities. (Moisi, 2012, p. 182) As the future carrier of architectural, urban and cultural context, the architectural students takes a number of simulated roles by which he/she questions personal potentials of conceptual statements in the academic space. The current

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the goal of retaining the creative-communicational transitions even after the realization of the planned program of the *Expression Plastique Studio* at the *National School of Architecture and Urbanism of Tunis*.

University experience with two groups of third year students of architecture (28 in total) in the process of getting accustomed to the pluralisms of contemporary artistic practice, through the conceptual creation of proposals of cultural-nomadic eventfulness, has pointed to the presence of cathartic elements built into the responses offered. For the purpose of this study it is important to stress that the students involved have a structured foundation of knowledge in fine arts and practical-plastic habits (acquired during 4 semesters), so the question that arises is why there is a sudden need for a step 'towards oneself', i.e. 'backwards', in order to go further.

This study aims to point out and evaluate those cathartic resonances that appear to be the triggers of transitivity of creative statements during the exercise "*Between You and Me*". The very title of the exercise indicates a specific dialogue between the outer and inner worlds of the architectural student. The outer world, as a set of diverse and simultaneous environments, directly influences the creation of views, relations, conceptual ideas and creative dilemmas of the architectural student. The student forms a personalized communicational ground towards these environments, in order to establish and maintain communicational exchange with the environments chosen. Should we accept the claim that inspiration is to be sought in the relative relations between the personal and outer environment, the student should strive to make this very personal transition functional in a non-standard way.

"The simulated relation towards cultural eventfulness makes the architectural students accustomed to openness and disposition in taking creative-communicational roles of various contexts" (Touati, 2014).

The crucial question underlying the pedagogical experience is: How can an art lecturer introduce the student of architecture into the creative-communicational world painlessly? How long can such "painlessly" last from the didactic standpoint and what about the other processes of harmonization at the level of creative self-awareness of the architectural student when the biographical and personal traits are unfavorable?

The student conceptualizer takes many simulated roles in the proposed research process, among which one of the most pronounced is the role of the 'transitional manager'. Those are the roles that are taken as *implied* in the *Expression Plastique Studio*, and are rationally fitted into the process of conceptual self-awareness. Engaging the student's creative dispositions in the research of the proposed simulated process of cultural eventfulness is based on the activation of the personal transitions involving honesty, alternativeness and non-competition, by creating the basis for acquiring conceptual capital. It is a kind of *l'art pour l'art* processes, which happen 'for their own sake', as 'transition for the sake of transition' and in the zoomed-in pedagogical phase are not directly triggered by market relations in the culture and society.

Our research points to two kinds of creative transitions that the architectural student is to integrate into a superior process:

- 1) personal transition (upon one's own choice, but influenced by the specific academic formation) and
- 2) conceptual-plastic transition of the pedagogical context.

The analytical perspective on the two creative transitions, made up of a number of smaller-scale ones, reveals that the personal creative transition is spontaneous, internal, experiential, non-programmed, complex, while the secondary transition is multi-contextual, strategic and modular.

"A man is rich in his personal potentials, but poor in his real ability to realize them in his lifetime. The official educational system necessarily narrows down the possibilities for human beings. H. Hesse was right in saying that 'what people assume under the notion of man is nothing more than a transient civil compromise'" (Šušnji , 1994, p. 238).

In the earlier pedagogical processes, as a rule, the specificities and details of personal creative transitions of architectural students have not been recognized. They have been continuously integrated in the identity structures of the students/conceptors, as procedures based on self-education. By highlighting these non-activated communicational exchanges, original pedagogical constructions can be accomplished between non-market, semi-market and market cultural productions with higher quality relations towards creatively aware individuals. With the maturation of conceptual alternativeness based on positive creative dispositions, a whole range of possibilities for new cognitive experience exchange is opened. By the same token, it is justifiable to expect the collection of reflexive models of cathartic statements during specific formal education, which would be predisposed to situate visual dialogue into the cultural environment. This hypothesis enables the intensification of the original creative dimension of the pedagogical context, which would be reflected on the social image of reality in the form of more homogeneous visual-plastic communication.

2. CATHARSIS AND TRANSITION

The definitions of the notions of *catharsis* range from the corporeal to ethical, spiritual and aesthetic purgation. In this study, catharsis is seen as a segment of a personal story, which gains the disposition of a creative stimulus (trigger) in the course of conceptual process. Cathartic narrativeness and conceptual process renew that creative spontaneity neglected through accelerated maturation. Cathartic statements as

synonyms of "I have something to tell you" are the will to strengthen the sense of belonging to the society and establish communicational stability. Plastic, spatial, performing and other kinds of "unpacking" cathartic contents open up the possibilities for: 1) the collection and selection of conceptual ideas; 2) the strengthening of expressive-communicational authorial suggestions and 3) the stabilizing of creative personality.

We regard the answers reached by the students/conceptors as a kind of hologram note in which the resonance of the cathartic derivatives is perceived multidimensionally and whose direct and indirect integration into the conceptual forms of cultural eventfulness contains the features of various but simultaneous transitions. By accepting the meaning of the notion of transition as a transfer from one creative idea into another, and from one conceptual phase into another, conditions are fulfilled for a chronological sustainability of step-by-step filtration processes, which should lead the architectural student to the creation of a personalized proposal of a conceptual product required in the exercise. The creative response, as the synthesis of visual, plastic and reflective investigations, testifies to simultaneous transitions developed in parallel, placing some of the results achieved into the defined conceptual proposal.

The process of becoming aware of the cathartic content, in the pedagogical context of the Studio, is a kind of questioning the creative powers of the conceptor with an analytical note towards the experienced, suppressed and unprocessed. We notice that the cathartic contents are prone to creative re-cycling through the research contextuality. Catharsis as a memory of certain information, experience and/or event is a *"repeated recovery, always leading us to a more credible understanding of the world"* (Velmar, quoted in: Vulicevic, 2014). Its manifestation ranges from an exceptionally controlled (minimalized, delayed, ignored, etc.)

to the explosive and uncontrolled ones. Our pedagogical context recognizes the need to focus on more specific vocabulary, such as: *cathartic process*, *cathartic product*, *cathartic environment*, as well as creative-communicational transition, *creative-transitional product*, *creative-transitional environment*, etc. Critical and self-critical responsibilities of all carriers of pedagogical ambience of creative awareness and self-awareness can ensure communicational balance between the real and suppressed, i.e. between the visible and the less visible. Catharsis as a retrograde, marginalized and addictive process arouses questions of deeper meaning of things and, as such, it is a pedagogical device for finding talented students/conceptors. Some phases of conceptual process accept catharsis as implied without its didactic fragmenting and recognition. For example:

- 1) during the sensitization of expressive, analytical, representational and communicational habits of the third year students of architecture,
- 2) during the establishing of the processing connection between: *idea choice of materials creation conceptualized message*,
- 3) during the experience of creative (conceptual) leap and innovative attributes,
- 4) during oral or written post-analysis of conceptual process and results achieved, and
- 5) during the exchange of thoughts with the pedagogical environment.

2.1. CATHARSIS, TRANSITION, CREATIVITY, COMMUNICATION

Faced with the conceptual task, the student commits him/herself to selecting one of his/her views and focusing on the meanings it reflects. The student/conceptor is obliged to introduce adequately the specificities of the view chosen, together with its predisposition to eventfulness, into the frames of individualized research. Thus catharsis is classified among the manifestations of an "*emotional slide*" (Goleman, 1995, p. 56), which additionally dynamize the

processing character of creative transitions of future architects.

Creative ideas are regarded as insights that the student uses in the conceptual work as guidelines through the contextual research. Conceptual creativity is the one that guides the mental, emotional and experiential engagement towards the visual-plastic proposal for a public dialogue, which enriches the transitional procedurality of the student's creative personality from the unrecognized or unengaged personal potential towards the communicational field of the Studio. By making the correlation between the four selected notions: *catharsis* (purgation), *transition* (bridging), *creativity* (creation) and *communication* (exchange), we achieve filtration of the course of the conceptual task. Each notion named has the property of verification of ideas and its materializations, personal attitude and relation towards the outer context towards which it is intended in the simulation.

Catharsis initiates the questioning both of subjective and objective sides of the same view with simultaneous possibilities for mental and emotional maturation of the process of creative self-awareness. This kind of transition, as a complex filtration process of a personal view, can be used as the preparation for creative communication with the environment, in the case of our pedagogical exercise, by a simulated relation towards the chosen cultural environment.

"The visible is the method and possibility of seeing, which relies on the experience of understanding the world of reality, transferred into imagination, and thus the creation of the relation between the real and possible" (Bogdanovic, 2007, p. 6).

Architectural students are expected to be able to expand the relations of cathartic and conceptual research and *stabilize* the results obtained. Productivity and success of the relation *catharsis-concept-communication* depend on the creative bridging. Since the reflective view is in constant motion, the

relation towards the re-created contents also changes. Adequate implementation of creative-transitional fluidities in a functional whole is the key for receiving pedagogically 'correct' responses resistant to additional questions and extensions. "A creator is a more sensitive and flexible thinker than others and is capable of using mental processes and merge mental styles in an extraordinary and exciting way" (Rotenberg, 2010, p. 70).

Pedagogical context recognizes multiple transitivities, which are placed into the proposed working phases, but also between them. The graph below shows the structure of the exercise, in which each arrow marks complex and different creative transitions, composed of a number of smaller ones, since in each of the phases they exist as internal and implied.



Graph no1.

Didactic procedure of creative transitions of students/conceptors

Pedagogical objectivity and subjectivity should find a way not to be led astray or deceived by the intriguing nature of the contents of some of the phases mentioned, but to support the procedurality which has the evolutionary power of configurational relations of the resulting whole.

"In a critical and self-critical perspective, the student analyzes the creative process more precisely, both as a whole and in segments, as well as the activators used, which contributed on

the way 'from question to response', i.e. 'from response to a new question', as the verification of creative sustainability of the conceptual proposal" (Touati, 2013).

The phases which would complement the pedagogical experience of the subjects of the Expression Plastique Studio in the same conceptual process are:

- a) detections and differentiations of cathartic reactions of the students during the creativeness (primal scream, personal drama, identity, alienation, traumatism, etc.),
- b) introspective procedure in the transformation of catharsis in a creative stimulus, and
- c) localized strengthening of creative transitions between the antipodal circumstances of conceptual research.

3. COMMUNICABILITY OF PUBLIC/PERSONAL IN THE PEDAGOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

Our pedagogical experience confirms that the intertwined internal eventfulness of the students is directly and/or indirectly built into the conceptual response. The student retells the sparks of coded eventfulness through cathartic statements and builds them into the conceptual proposal for a cultural eventfulness. Self-awareness activities are accompanied with: emotions, doubts, confusion, needs for stating, additional self-perception, etc. Conceptual reactions of students point to a need for communication, musical rhythm, bodily movement, fragmental visualization of autobiographic stories and friendly support.

Several video-works by the students can be used to derive the basic index of terms of cathartic resonances on the roads of creative self-awareness. "Experience is not what has happened to us, but what we do with what has happened" (Hargie, quoted in: Lalovi, 2009, p. 53). The segments of the results obtained by the students/conceptors reveal the complex contours of the pedagogical context in the detection and development of creative-transitional processes at formational,

communicational and cultural levels:

1/ **Rim Rachdi:** *"The train of life"* The author performs choreography of her own to the atonal, undulated, progressive and chaotic sounds of a mandolin. The central object of her attention is a large empty suitcase, which she repositions by dynamic and rotating bodily movements on the stage. Her partner manually changes the expressions of her face, by forcing a grin, which she cannot get used to. There remains reflection over a pile of suitcases in a corner. The author writes in her exposé: *"Train is a meeting point of various faces, bodies and hopes"*.

2/ **Saber Tounsi:** *"A Seychelles beach"*. In a limited space on the stage, the author nervously wonders around, euphorically singing personal poetry on disappointment by 'extreme modernity' and his need to go far away. The author spills liquid acrylic over visual documentation of the contemporary society, thus becoming himself a surface over which the paint drips down. He sings: *"I want to live in a tropical atmosphere, surrounded by pineapple, kiwi and coconut trees.... in a complete harmony in every sense"*. The performance lasts until the author is entirely physically exhausted.

3/ **Boumaiza Ghada:** *"The walking dead"* Sensing a great danger, the author runs out of the bed with Santa Claus's hat, and manically runs around the house chased by diabolical people. After that she runs out into the street to the waterfront with a 'ball' in her hands. The music, taken from the movie 'Requiem for a dream', intensifies the total uncertainty. After many obstacles and experienced terror, the author manages to throw the "ball" into the sea. The secret of the "ball", which is covered in broken mirror pieces, remains unresolved to the audience. At the end of the black-and-white version of the video, there is the note reading *"Good-bye everyday life!"*.

4/ **Nejla Harrouch:** *"Gammarth, sea view"*. The performer puts a black garbage bag on her head and disturbs the lovers of deep sea by interrupting their looks asking spontaneously for their help in order not to fall from a precipice full

of empty packages of "take-away" foods. In the end, she enjoys the sea view, but she cannot see it because of the black bag. The people present behave as if it's all normal.

5/ **Ben Sidhom Amel:** *"For life in the present burn memories!"*. The author and her colleague burn newspapers with lighters, pour water from a hose, while they simulate drowning and struggle for life in the slow motion rhythm of the song "Sail" by the band Awolnation. The energy of this work is so strong that the viewer identifies him/herself with the performers.

The delicate communicative incompatibility between the student's personality and the role of the student of architecture is recognizable through the emitted (cathartic) messages. They point to the existence of memories encapsulated in the personality of the future architect, which intensifies the bipolarity of the public and private. *"Playing a role is an attempt to re-create an early trauma, with a hope for a happier ending"* (Janov, 1992, p.195). The will and strength to express the suppressed testifies to the need share the personal truth with the receptive environment, with which the student also shares the quest. The scale of the temperament of the participants of the pedagogical story, from introverted, melancholic, to stable, but also extroverted, brings to light a multitude of communicational contents which saturate the stage of the Expression Plastique Studio.

3.1. COMMUNICATIONAL-HOLISTIC TRANSITIVITY OF PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT

Our initial assumption for the realization of this exercise was that the student is sufficiently aware of the structure of his/her creative capacities, and that the lecturer/practitioner is permeable for understanding another person, by knowing her own self. The creation of productive dialogues in collaboration with the art lecturer comes from the student's ability to triage the ideas for visual-plastic construction of messages and their distribution in a creative way. When we zoom

into the pedagogical segment of the Studio, where the episodic 'turmoil' of the creative-communicational transitions of students/conceptors take place, we notice anecdotal dimensions of conceptual courses, with which Something needs to be done. The pedagogical goal is not to stay at the symbolic of the eventfulness of cathartic, conceptual and/or communicational statements, but to discover their interwoven powers in the maturation of mental and emotional efforts of the participants of the Studio as "sane psychological operations" (Rotenberg, 2010, p. 194) of creative education. The acceptance of the meaning of creative-communicational transition as a process which is not continuously inspiring, but is conflicting, regressive and anxious, makes it imperative that the pedagogical context should deepen the acquired experiential insights.

From the pedagogical point of view the experientiality of the following connections of creative statements has been noted: 1) with the working stimulus (as a process), 2) with the content of conceptual research of eventfulness (as a theme) and 3) with intensive presence at both planes (process + theme). In all cases, the creative reconstruction, as a generator of the conceptualized responses of the zoomed-in students of architecture, directs the pedagogical context towards the private, intimate and personal. The student/conceptor proposes the establishment of public creative communication with those environments in which he/she believes will find an adequate collocutor: in the noise of a public place and public transport, at specific locations (coastline, edge of a forest), in the circle of friends. The scenography of some of the works is emphasized by stereotyped symbols: suitcase, newspapers, flame, hose water, music, Santa Claus's hat, mega-polis photographs, spilling of acrylic paints, plastic garbage bag.... Those are all civilizational traces, which the students/conceptors use as a sort of prompts, for practicing to produce creative-communicational statements towards themselves, but also, towards the Other.

"We find ourselves in front of great possibilities of visual cognition, but it is not simply the sizes, amounts and kinds of revelation of the properties of matter, form and space unknown to us by now, but also the meaning of the emancipating bond on the relation present-future in the struggle against visual contamination" (Bogdanovic, 2005, p. 518).

Pedagogical insights point to the fact that the two groups of students of architecture indirectly and individually state their need for:

- liberation from the reflexive stereotypes and creative uniformity of contemporary society,
- intensification of autonomy of expression in the pedagogical environment,
- ignoring the form of homo *biographicus* in the creative (re)construction, and
- expanding the field of emancipated communication outside the pedagogical 'nest'.

The creative traits of the students of architecture which we observed confirm the need for an expression of emotional intelligence, in various aspects of its truth, and for tolerance and protection of that emotion, as well as for branching and expansion in the pedagogical context. The works created, as self-representations of creative identities of the students/conceptors in formation, have the power of building the frame, structure and functions of the pedagogical potential of the Studio.

4. SELF-AWARENESS CREATIVE RECONSTRUCTIONS IN THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT

The resonances of the cathartic statements, built into the creative transitions of zoomed-in students of architecture, arouse the reciprocal question of the cathartic nature of the pedagogical structure for the creative formation of future architects, stressing those configurational parts which make it immobile and sequential. From the didactic point of view, cathartic statements have the disposition to dynamize the divergence of thought for the sake of: creative-communicational self-awareness of the students of architecture, reconstruction of

their creative identity and relation to the society, but also the creative-communicational re-transitivity of the pedagogical context in which everything takes place simultaneously. Those are manifestations that take place now, without any chance of delay for another pedagogical time of communicational exchange. The transitional relations between the creative conceptual roles of the architectural students and the formational roles of the artists lecturers can be filtered simultaneously:

- 1)by stimulating visual-plastic curiosity and will for its exchange,
- 2)by familiarization with nuanced terminology of cathartic, creative, conceptual and communicational statements of the participants of the *Expression Plastique* Studio with the purpose of "learning from each other",
- 3)by dynamization of motivation for conceptual transitivity and exchange of attainment in the creative (reconstructed) insights,
- 4)by analytical-reflexive views of the architectural students and lecturer/practitioner towards the creative-communicational reconstructions of awareness and self-awareness,
- 5)by intensification of pedagogical trust between the participants of the formation process,
- 6)by protection of creative independence and its communicability,
- 7)by evaluation of creative-communicational transitions in a complex expanse of educative process and
- 8)by visual-plastic sensitization of communication between various environments.

If the "*quality and originality of the conceptual proposal*" are a criterion for evaluating the results obtained, from the pedagogical experience, the following obligations are initiated:

- 1)abandoning the habits of conceptual encapsulation of the participants of the Studio,
- 2)initiation of the "*relation with the other, who expands the selfness*" (Todorov, 2003, p.108), and
- 3)expanding the meaning of creative originality

as a transitional awareness of future architects.

5. CONCLUSION

The pedagogical experience of intensifying creative transitions of future architects in the academic context of the *Expression Plastique* Studio at *The National School of Architecture* and Urbanism of Tunis supports relational, participatory and contributive visual-plastic creation. The creative way of thinking, and its conceptual multi-functioning, requires from the third year students of architecture a continuous filtration of awareness, self-awareness, critical and self-critical habits, in order to result in a fluid and structured adaptation to their future professional roles of a holistic view of the world. Awareness raising of the creative sensibilities enables individualized formation of specific methodological procedures for conceptual proposals, which makes the architectural student more constructive, more responsible, productive and independent. Those are the processes that each student independently stated as those through which he/she constructs the research experience.

OUR RESEARCH FINDINGS ARE:

- 1) that the student/conceptor puts personal experience into a more valid position during the creative research in relation to external sources (artistic, cultural, socio-economic, etc.),
- 2) that the observed students of architecture have non-instrumentalized relation towards the cathartic contents during the visual-plastic conception of cultural eventfulness,
- 3) there is a conceptual risk that cathartic contents and their effects may overpower the transitional power of the creative view in the solution of the proposed task,
- 4) that the realized conceptual proposals of cultural eventfulness have the predisposition of complex communicational questioning of their authors, age group audience and lecturers/practitioners,
- 5) that the creative fitting of cathartic contents

into conceptual responses initiate the overcoming of alienation and non-communication, 6) that the student nonverbally strives for the modification of pedagogical context of the Studio in search for further branching and sensitization of the relation between the non-market and market values, and 7) the need for pedagogical displacement of boundaries towards the notion of creative-communicational transition, which needs to be both disciplined and innovative.

The pedagogical form and structure of the *Expression Plastique* Studio, as a kind of semi-market space, is based on active continuities of creative-communicational transitions of future architects. The types of relations towards oneself and the society observed enable the exchanges which happen spontaneously in the consideration of cultural contexts. From the pedagogical standpoint, we stress the concentration of creative-communicational potentials of the students/conceptors as the capital with a power of conversion, revitalization and humanization of the market perspective and demand for additional cultural proposals. The creative self-awareness of an individual, in the pedagogical context of research of cultural eventfulness, bears a constructive inertia for its sustainability and independence of communicational identities, carefully thought-of forms and organismic structures. Such ambience bears the sparks of an alternative method of university education and a continuous process of questioning. The work on personal and team identities of visual-plastic communication enables conceptual affirmations of experience and engaged integration with the pedagogical expanse and outside it.

The empirical experience shows that for the structuring of the transitional range of conceptual creativity architectural students, it can be productive to focus pedagogical attention on the following:

1) dynamization of individualized creative-communicational statements of the students/conceptors,

2) accumulation of conceptual experiences and the investigation of their adequacy for re-experimenting,
 3) introduction and application of a specific vocabulary of communicational authenticity in order to evaluate the experiential processualness of creative experiences,
 4) maintenance of an introspective view as a didactic path in shaping the autonomous methodologies of conceptual research,
 5) acceptance of creative transitions as motivational procedures in defining the creative behavior and in obtaining conceptual capital by the architectural students,
 6) initiating pedagogical transitivity and experience in the initiations of eventfulness of conceptual proposals by the students/conceptors,
 7) maintaining the continuity of pedagogical auto-innovativeness and fluid auto-revitalization, and
 8) cooperative expansion of creative transitions of the subjects of the Studio, which re-actualizes the university context of specific formation of future architects.

The weaknesses of the pedagogical process situated between catharsis and concept are the following:

a) impossibility of creating documentation on certain phases of creative experience by the student/conceptor for the age group exchange at the level of the Studio,
 b) lack of pedagogical opportunities for post-experience between the student/conceptor and the arts lecturers, and
 c) lack of pedagogical habits of creative exchange between the Studio and the environments.

The pedagogical experience obtained shows that the creative transitions of the students/conceptors are not based on the linear A-B-C principle, but on nuanced intertwining of vast contents of conceptual experience adequate for cooperative markets, and not for competitive ones. Creative transitions that developed on the

conceptual experiences of the zoomed-in students/conceptors, in the specific pedagogical context, arouse the essential questions of creative being, communication and exchange.

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