






# CON FIA 2021

9<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
ON ILLUSTRATION  
& ANIMATION



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# Character Development through Co-creation Process, in a Twitch Community



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[Drawing/Characters/Comics]

## Abstract

Within the scope of Illustration and Animation, we intend to explore how practical and creative work can be developed from the influences of other individuals, considering their imagery and creative points of view. Widespread access to new technologies has made it possible to communicate and share our thoughts and ideas easily, where the platform Twitch has allowed us to work on what we propose.

In this article we address the potential of Twitch as a mediating platform to develop ideas for characters, while exploring concepts related to co-creation. This co-creation work resulted in the exploration of those ideas launched by the followers in sketches and illustrated digital work. This research was part of a study to an animated short project developed during master's degree of illustration and animation.

We have realized the value of sharing the artistic process online, due to the real-time development of the ideas of different stakeholders; and this co-creation methods resulted in the exploration of the ideas launched by the followers, in sketches and illustrated digital work. Although the project varied due to the diversity of the participants, brainstorming remained constant, which made it possible to explore concepts such as creativity and integration.

## 1. Introduction

Twitch.tv allows individuals to broadcast uncommon and personal experiences when compared to common working environments, mainly due to the ease of communication and dialogue, share of interests and accessibility for other online people according to Grohn [1] (p. 6). Many individuals use this platform to stream art and broadcast their own artistic process online. This platform became very popular among artists due to its immersive connection with the viewers based on the opinion of other music artists experience on Twitch [2]. The author also started streaming on this platform, where she develops personal work like paintings and drawings in the Art category.

The project framed on this paper started in a master's degree course and involved the creation of a pre-production for an animation film, based

## Keywords

Co-creation, Twitch, Stream, Character Design

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on a narrative previously written by the author. Since the author had already begun the streaming sessions on Twitch, there was an interest in developing it during the online streams.

Therefore, we intend to analyze how a community on Twitch can influence the ideas flow to generate new concepts for characters. To accomplish this requirement, the channel of *Shamatata* on Twitch was selected as a tool to achieve this goal by prompting discussions to explore collaborative creative ideas and originate new ones. *Shamatata* is the nickname used as the streamer's identifier, represented by the author.

The article starts by addressing the notion of co-creation and a short explanation of this definition. After, we will show examples of different online communities and how they impacted on specific projects. Then, we compare the characteristics of their procedural method with our own work. We then briefly explain the Twitch platform while, at the same time, we demonstrate how this platform was important to create new ideas for characters. Finally, conclude by explaining the context of how the characters evolved to become the final illustrations.

## **2. Brief Introduction about the Project: Collaborative Processes Used in the Development of Animation Projects**

As an artist, the pursuit for adaptation on social networks accompanied us throughout our academic life. Since its creation, Twitch has been one of the most used platforms that allowed the authors to produce work alongside other users online. As soon as we started to think about what kind of topic, we wanted to explore for the master's degree project, there was a sense of trying to connect it with the online streams.

This platform provides the possibility of real-time streaming, it allows an individual to be able to show their personal artwork to other platform users, while communicating with each other. Social networks, such as Twitch, enables greater sociability among various individuals from all over the world, which triggered us to develop an artistic work with the help of *Shamatata*'s followers.

In terms of procedural development, we started by studying Design Thinking processes, where the concept of co-creation was founded. According to the dictionary, the term co-creation is separated by the prefix "co-" which "expresses the notion of company. Collaborate" and by the term "creation", being "the action of giving existence or making appear out of nothing, the act or effect of creating. (...) Process of designing, making, organizing something new, unknown, innovative (as a work, invention, production) (...)" [3].

In this definition, co-creation's prefix is associated with the concept of collaboration, but Rill and Hamalainen adds that it can also have the designation of collectivity [4] (p.22). Co-creation is not just about working collaboratively, it also involves more communication, coordination and consensus [4] (p. 23). In other words, co-creation involves more interaction from all parties and each one offers value to the process, as demonstrated by Ramaswamy and Ozcan [5] (p. 280).

These thoughts are in line with what we intended. That is, to understand how through the Twitch platform, which provides methods of

collective communication, we would be able to develop mechanisms to obtain greater coordination and consensus among all those involved.

It is important to emphasize that the ideas suggested by users are influenced by many conditions: not only because an idea can manifest itself and have several different results, but also because this process can be affected by the streamer's personal tastes and considerations, as well as the capabilities and limitations of the artist.

### 3. Examples of Co-creation - The Case study Pixar, “Derpy Hooves” and “Sonic”

As we learned more about co-creation, we found out that Pixar's company was known for their co-creation process, which was a very strong influence on this project. This company is known by the way that the director gave creative freedom to his workers, by incentivizing for more openness and communication between them, that is explained by Rill e Hamalainen [4] (p. 10). Even when the company was competing with other studios by trying to achieve the first computer-animated film with contemporary technological tools, Catmull states that they shared their knowledge via online platforms, while they were competing against other companies with the same goal [6] (p. 24). Even though it didn't bring immediate rewards, it still promoted the project and sparked interest by important animators and programmers which led to important developments for the first trials and later even signed contracts with other companies such as Disney.

This example not only showed how the company valued the importance of sharing knowledge on social networks to gain some feedback and value in return, but also how the company was recognized for their continuous and free flowing communication between coworkers. However, this example doesn't talk specifically about character design through social media outrage. Pixar had a more intentional approach to collaboration, while the next two examples are based on public opinion.

In the animated series *My Little Pony*, “Derpy Hooves” was a character most adored and criticized by fans. The exaggerated characterization by his crooked eyes (Fig. 1), voice and actions caught the attention of fans who quickly started discussions on various online platforms. Over time based on public opinion, “Derpy Hooves” suffered undergoing changes until it became compromising. For many fans, the character represented an offense to individuals with mental disabilities. The controversies forced its reintroduction with less exaggerated characteristics.

These radical changes, both by the appreciation and the aversion of the public, directly influenced its evolution as a character. As mentioned by Meyers “Derpy is a very clear illustration of the power of collective creativity. Derpy was not created by any one individual or even by a small

Fig. 1 “Derpy Hooves” illustration.



creative team; she is the product of the collective creative capacity of the fan community. This sort of collective creativity is a new phenomenon that the internet has allowed for” [7] (p. 33).

In our point of view, the growth of the character “Derpy Hooves” has gained merit and popularity through the diversity of proposals offered by individuals through online platforms and the way that the producers integrated them.

Most recently, the study shown by Whitten about the fans discontentment toward the characterization of aesthetics of *Sonic The Hedgehog* in his first 3D feature film. Many fans were critical of the first trailer that was launched online Through Twitter posts and Youtube videos, the fans mocked and also redesigned the character which prompted the company to improve the looks of this iconic character [8].

Fan groups on the internet can be very diverse, as Jenkins et al defend “(...) with values and assumptions that fragment along axes of class, age, gender, race, sexuality, and nationality, to name just a few” [9] (p. 54). The number of different connections, experiences and values shared over the internet can build infinite new variances of outputs and ideas.

Due to the familiarity and popularity of both examples, social media made it possible to warn the creators with fan’s personal inputs, and the different communities almost feel like they have ownership of the outcomes. Unfortunately, this could make it very restricting for creators to get out of the public opinion, due to the fact that the fan’s perception could directly influence the acceptance of the actual final product. However, those demands can be beneficial and integrate positive changes.

Both of those examples also show the creative power of sharing information through social media platforms which can also work as free advertisement for the companies via outrage marketing.

The formula for developing our own project was focused on the volatility of chat discussions of a Twitch community and the possibilities that the platform provides to bring together unusual communities and initiate new and exciting connections. Koster argues that a strategy of greater creativity implies changing contexts, people, groups, cultures, subcultures, among others, that is, taking a simple idea out of context and changing its process “(...) is actually your biggest tool for creativity” [10] (17”31’).

However, the style of the characters “Derpy Hooves” and “Sonic” was already chosen beforehand, or it was already known from fans, and the inputs were chosen in offline platforms. What we sought for this article was to create new characters from scratch based on new ideas and see how they develop through real-time inputs from external individuals.

In the next chapter, we will analyze how this platform helped in these demands as an instrument for creative exploration.

#### **4. Character Development Strategy with a Community on Twitch and its Potential in Co-creation Processes**

Every channel on Twitch has the same user experience. From a spectator point of view, while watching a channel or stream, on the left is a window of the broadcaster’s channel that can be customized freely by the streamer,

and, on the right, there is a chatting window. Everyone that creates an account on Twitch can broadcast streams and has the same layout. Usually, the streamer has access to chat and can respond to the users in real time.

As explained before, we took advantage of the architecture of Twitch's platform to develop in real time illustrations based on the inputs from followers, for new character concepts.

Like explained before, chat was the most important tool. With that in mind, we started by saving some suggestions in Google Forms that people could access through chat and contribute. The chat had integrated commands that allowed the followers to read the instructions about the project and make all links easily accessible for them to enter the Google Forms.

In order to stimulate the users to write more information about the characters that they imagined, Google Forms' document had writing prompts, such as: "Please tell us your name if you want your name/nick to appear in the animation"; "Do you have some ideas for me to start working on?"; and "Write down some names of artists that might help to make your idea come true".

Every idea submitted in Google Forms would be reproduced during a stream. Those published ideas on Google forms would appear written on the broadcaster's stream in order for people to understand what we planned to work on in that session. The outcome of an idea was reproduced in real-time and the engagement of chat influenced the outcome of the sketches that were produced on stream. However, there was no obligation for participation, everybody was free to choose to be a part of it or not. The experiment of the sketches started on 26 of May 2020 and ended on 6 of June 2020. Altogether, there were eleven proposals that were submitted. One of them

**Fig. 2** Sketches arranged chronologically.



was not addressed because it was a non-serious comment with no valuable content and one of the proposals was merged to another one because they had the same type of ideas and were published by the same chatter. In Fig. 2 are the results of every sketch developed based on those inputs published on Google Forms.

Next, with the help of other social media, the results of the illustrations were published, and it also created ways for individuals to vote for their most

**Fig. 3** Final countdown (the sketches that won had exactly 18 votes each).



**Fig. 4** Flower Face., 2017, Balbyshev, O, Oils in canvas, 35X25 cm.

**Fig. 5** First sketch created based on the inputs from chat.



**Fig. 6** Second sketch.

**Fig. 7** Third sketch.



favorite sketches, of which the most voted ones were selected. The winning sketches were number 1, 4 and 8 on Fig. 2. Coincidentally, those three sketches had exactly the same number of votes as we can see in Fig. 3.

Based on the outcome of the vote, we started to render each character. This project had a lot of different phases, all of which are still accessible on a website with all the information available<sup>4</sup>. However, we are going to focus on the explanation of

the winning characters' conception and how the sketches evolved. After that, we will provide a small contextualization of the characters with the narrative and how they were iterated until the final version of each one.

#### 4.1. Flower Face

We started this new challenge with the suggestion to create a character out of a flower. This was based on an anonymous chatter mentioned a painting titled "Flower Face" (Fig. 4).

While the streamer was developing a draft of a face, she asked the users for examples of flowers that they wanted to see in this character's representation. Initially, several joined and mentioned some of the

flowers they liked the most and, as a result, we decided to start the first sketch with those ideas altogether, as we can see in Fig. 5, which was heavily influenced by the painting that was suggested previously.

The suggestions continued to develop and we built three complementary sketches. The following inspirations involved the incorporation of a carnivorous plant, where we replaced the lips with a carnivorous plant, as we can see in Fig. 6, which influenced Fig. 7. During discussions in the chat, users described the largest carnivorous plant in the world, *Nepenthes Rajah* Vines, which served as the motto for the third drawing. But, as opposed to

Fig. 6, in Fig. 7 we only incorporated the texture and not the shape of it.

After the changes on the lips, it was decided to test other features on the rest of the head, like the nose and hair. Since the lips in the second and third image looked like they came from a horror movie, a follower released the proposal in the chat of recreating the nails from the iconic figure from *Hellraiser* (1987). Like-

<sup>4</sup> All information available about the project: <https://www.notion.so/shamatata/Master-s-degree-Project-0b5421354e14411d8dc99757f38a2c27>



wise came the proposal for the nose, based on the shape of the character Lord Voldemort, from the *Harry Potter* movies.

Finally, we added one more example that had been taken directly from Fig. 5. This time, a chatter proposed to place one of the flowers from the first sketch in the upper part of the head, which resulted in Fig. 8.

**Fig. 8** Zoom of one of the flowers developed in the first sketch.

## 4.2. Blue Alien

The description of the idea was as follows: “I’d like you to make a small blue alien with a bigger head and glowing eyes”, promoted by follower *ThePino*.

The image that the follower sent us as a reference was the alien from the movie *Monsters vs Aliens* (2009), as we can see in Fig. 9. Throughout the sketch phase of this character, this particular follower referred several times to the phrase “Just smile and wave”. Within the community, we thought of ways to take advantage of these two ambivalences of the Fig. 9 and the phrase that the user continuously referred to. Initially, this character was developed very similar to the reference, as we can see in the center of Fig. 10.



Therefore, the followers considered adding something that would allow the character to wave which came as an idea of creating a hand connected to the simple shape of the alien. Basically, from these suggestions, the character Blue Alien was born. Some color experiments were also carried out, yet ultimately we went with the original idea of a blue alien.



**Fig. 9** B.O.B.

**Fig. 10** Sketch based on *ThePino*'s inputs.

## 4.3. Jellyfish

The follower *Tiago\_Aleixo* suggested the following idea: “I would love to see a jellyfish inspired creature; could be humanoid or not... (that would be telepathic). This character would appear out of nowhere and just drop some wisdom or start some chaos!!! They always have a bunch of little orb fairies around them that share their magic to help it!”.

This idea began with the representation of a jellyfish, from images sent through the chat, represented in Fig. 11. In Fig. 12 other species of jellyfish were recommended, such as: “White Spotted Jellyfish (*Phyllorhiza Punctata*)”, “Fried Egg Jellyfish (*Phacellophora Camtschatica*)” and “Cooler Fried Egg Jellyfish (*Cotylorhiza Tuberculata*)”.



**Fig. 11** Sketch based on *Tiago\_Aleixo*'s inputs.

**Fig. 12** Sketch based on *Tiago\_Aleixo*'s inputs.

## 4. Character Design and Mood boards

Like it was mentioned earlier in the introduction, a story was previously written by the author. It was one of the reasons why we began the characters ideas development. However, it was difficult to fully explain the whole story to the viewers which caused the chatters to begin writing random ideas for a different type of story. Now, the ideas were intimately connected to the sketches already developed, which led to the creation of a new story.

Even though we are not focusing on the explanation of the story in this paper, we provide a small review of important moments that influenced the characters appearance.

Flower face (Fig.13) is a character that starts by being friendly but eventually shifts to becoming meaner. The meanness of the character was stylized by triangular shapes. Even though some of the silhouettes are very similar on Fig. 13, she is a character that can morph her body easily. The humanoid shape was influenced by her previous memories when she had some contact with humans that visited the island where she lived. Through-out polls during streams, we selected the Fig. 8 as the guide to develop her appearance. In order to simplify the complexity of Fig. 8, during the streams we decided to make her whole head in the shape of a flower instead and reduce the complexity of the petals. The dirt around her is part of the ground where she used to live and nowadays she carries it everywhere.

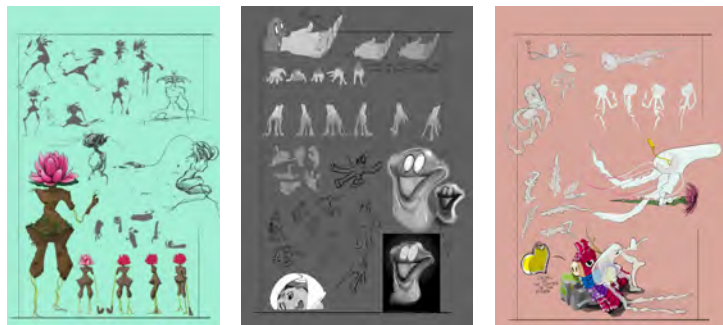
Contrary to Flower Face, Blue Alien did not go through a lot of changes as we can see on Fig. 14. But it was also one of the most difficult ones to integrate in the story. We decided that it was a parasite that fell from space and had previously possessed the corpse of an astronaut. Therefore, we decided to design illustrations for the astronaut, such as its face and its hand. Because the Alien was a parasite, we decided that the alien took the hand of the astronaut with it to be able to move around more effectively on earth.

Finally, Jellyfish was a character where we got more into the props rather than changing it from the sketches, which added context to its life experiences and background. For example, to make it look older, we implemented a cane that would help it move around under the ocean which was the first prop. The second one was a clock that symbolized the character was going through an emotional crisis. Finally, the third prop was a piñata. The pinata is Jellyfish's home under the ocean, which helps to represent a very emotional and eccentric character.

**Fig. 13** Final character design of Flower Face as a result of collective inputs from *Shamatata's* chatters.

**Fig. 14** Final character design of Blue Alien as a result of collective inputs from *Shamatata's* chatters.

**Fig. 15** Final character design of Jellyfish as a result of collective inputs from *Shamatata's* chatters.



## Conclusion

Overall, as the article shows, all proposals in themselves were very simplistic and not completely original ideas. However, in our point of view, as soon as the real-time inputs started, the concepts began to become more interesting. The ideas changed due to public opinion, individual experiences, personal preferences, and some of the chatters even started to develop some background stories and fantasies for some of the characters. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the various ways of how the chatters give inputs. We realized that it was the author's responsibility to integrate them into the final products. For example, in the blue alien idea, a particular follower made a joke about how to develop this character, expressing during chat: "just smile and wave". That input led us to the idea of a hand, even though it wasn't what the follower wrote previously.

In this point of view, we agree with Catmull, president of Pixar, when he argues the importance of relying more on people rather than ideas [6] (p. 52). Some of the chatters showed us some related projects that were also based on crowd sourced ideas.

There was a point where the immense number of inputs could feel overwhelming, that's why it was important to establish a schedule that helped to organize time to work. Conducting this project on Twitch, we believe was interesting due to the various types of chatters, including their different backgrounds and levels of interest. That is why the project was so exciting and difficult to predict.

Also, the way that the project started led us to continue working alongside other users with the co-creation concept. Personally, this experience has driven an interest in actually finishing the animation and learning how to involve some individuals that showed interest in working within different aspects of the project. Some chatters specialized in different areas such as sound design, 3D design, and the principles of animation, which allowed for new perspectives to emerge. This added more value to the experience and to the project as each person could contribute to the best of their knowledge.

It is also important to address that, in comparison to the "Derpy Hooves" example, *Shamatata's* channel is not as well-known as the animation of *My Little Pony*. In that point of view, it allowed us to better understand each chatter's inputs. Even though the rendering of the illustrations were always influenced by the streamer's artistic abilities, the close contact with the chatter's allowed for more thorough communication of the specific concepts. This also was a limitation to those individuals' proposals.

As we reference in the last chapter, we changed the narrative for the animation film because the followers began to develop a personal interest in the characters. This led us to rewrite a new story where we allowed for new concepts to arise, leading us to a collective narrative created by all the chatters.

To conclude, the presented work is only a part of a bigger project that includes other work processes, where we reference a more detailed way in which the story was created.

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