

Creativity in sport: courses of recognition

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Abstract: Due to the increasing number of examples in which the concept of creativity is related to sports contests, the aim of this paper is to critically examine the genealogy and some consequences of what means acting in a creative way during a sports performance. The analysis concerning the role of the definition with Heidegger’s explanation of the principle of identity provide sound contributes in order to understand what creativity is like. Rather than being conceived as sort of phenomenon having its several characteristics, it is more useful to acknowledge the unavoidable relevance of the recognition as the fundamental moment for a meaningful comprehension. As a result of this process, appearing creative in sport is a matter of twofold courses of recognition.

Keywords: creativity; identity; definition; sports philosophy.

1. Definitions of creativity

Nowadays, when an athlete shows an impressive performance more often they are labelled as a creative player or even as a genius. Despite the category of creativity primarily being used within the artistic environments, or the word genius basically serving to indicate the extraordinary abilities of the author of those art masterpieces; it seems that concepts such as creativity and genius are fully entailed within sports contests and references seem to reinforce that thesis (Sadler, 1977; Fairchild, 1978; Lacerda & Mumford, 2010; Hopsicker, 2011; Aggerholm, Jespersen & Ronglan, 2011; Campos, 2014). Nevertheless, some questions remain unsolved and concern: What is creativity? How does a creative sport action happen? Or, when does an athlete act brilliantly?

The issue regarding creativity has been widely faced by psychologists who developed several theories over the years which imply different conceptions of what creativity is. Unsurprisingly, there is not yet a common and shared idea of what being creative effectively means. (Plucker, Beghetto, Dow, 2004). Simply put, one acts creatively any time her action produces something that is novel as well as appropriate, generative and influential (Stokes, 2005). Within psychology, theories exist such as the Psychodynamic Models (Lubert, 2001), which consider creativity as something which concerns the unconscious process, in other words creativity occurs when the individual is somehow unaware of it. On the other hand, there are other theories, such as the Personality Models of Creativity which, although they differ each other, they place more emphasis on the role of the individual (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Finally, Psychometric Models of Creativity (Weisberg, 1986) root their conception in the idea that creativity is simply a matter of divergent thinking and as such it can be either developed (Mummert, Baker & Bertsch, 2010), fostered or even taught (Rasmussen & Østergaard, 2016).

That brief excursus should be sufficient to prove that there is not one commonly agreed idea of creativity. Nevertheless, whether if we consider creativity as something that happens unconsciously regardless our will, or contrary as something which depends on individual skills, what those approaches have in common is the core idea that creativity is, somehow, concretely something. Curiously, common sense reveals the same dualism regarding creativity. For instance, we may argue that creativity is a sort of gift given by someone or something bigger than human. Moreover, we may believe that everyone has a different amount of creativity in his inner and its actualization depends on someone else capable of bringing it out. In both cases, creativity is considered as concretely something which has its peculiar features. This something, called creativity, has been differently defined as having specific characteristics such as novelty, unpredictability, goal oriented, insights producer, effectiveness and so on. Finally, it seems extremely hard to conceive creativity as something having its own distinguishing aspects and characteristics.

Sports philosophy has not ignored such issues, and several authors (Lacerda & Mumford 2010; Hopsicker, 2011; Campos, 2014) have already attempted to provide sound arguments and criteria with which it is possible to examine what effectively creativity is within sports context. In doing so, those philosophers followed pretty much the same procedure which consist of:

- Stating a general definition of creativity or genius;
- Adding some examples drawn either artistic, or sports, or other related environments;
- Acquiring some categories from the synergy created by merging the definition and the examples;
- Reinforcing all that process with either some philosophical account possibly quoting renowned philosopher (Lacerda & Mumford 2010; Campos 2014), or referring to other authors or historical tradition (Hopsicker, 2011).

Analysing the Daniel Campos' paper (2014), it is a clear example of that sort of methodology: the procedure is explicitly illustrated section by section already in the abstract and in the opening pages. From a methodological point of view all this process results correct: it is rational since establishing a definition it follows logically sound principles which finally allow the authors to state what creativity is. In what they call the 'standard definition of creativity', Mark Runco and Garrett Jaeger (2012) suggest that creativity requires both originality and effectiveness. Teresa Lacerda and Stephen Mumford (2010, p. 191) seem to be on the same line when they explain that the genius is 'an exceptional talent who is able to innovate new successful strategies'. Peter Hopsicker (2011, p. 114) establishes three different criteria which, in his opinion, enable to define what is creativity in sport, namely '1) preparation, 2) taking-risk and responsibility, 3) dwelling'. Campos (2014, p. 52) in turn, develops a longer definition based on a phenomenological account of sporting experience. He defines creativity in sport as 'the ability to respond to the physical challenges encountered in the practice of sport in spontaneous and imaginative ways on the basis of carefully cultivated physical and mental – or bodyminded – habits'. These papers have in common the idea that creativity is, somehow, something with distinguishable criteria and characteristics which specifically define it.

As far as I'm concerned there is just one critical issue which demands clarification. That is, in order to answer to the question: What is creativity? This kind of process begins providing a definition of creativity, and later it attempts to find examples or criteria confirming the previous hypothesis verifying the correctness of the definition itself. This process seems akin to a mere tautology, camouflaged as logical correct procedure. Indeed, to verify the correctness of the given definition doesn't mean to test the conformity with the phenomenon described by the definition. As a matter of fact, this procedure which is correct from a formal point of view, runs the risk of being empty of meaning. Willing to avoid this risk, it needs to embody two essential moments of recognition:

- to recognize the role of the definition, its rules and its status of literary genre;

- to recognize that specific phenomenon as having those characteristics, criteria and elements stated by the definition itself.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to consider creativity not as something in itself, but rather as an act which becomes a creative act when someone recognizes that act as creative. In order to do that, this paper will:

- critically examine the role of the definition itself;
- apply the result of that investigation to a deconstructive interpretation of what is defined, that is creativity and creative act in sport;
- finally, demonstrate that a creative act is whatever action acknowledged as creative. Thus, no player/athlete is creative, rather he/she appears creative because his/her action is acknowledged as creative by others.

Our will is to avoid the over mentioned procedure, it implies to begin reconsidering definition just as a sort of rhetorical tool whose genealogy needs to be clarified.

2. The definition as specific literary genre

Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009, 43) states in his *Philosophical Investigations* that ‘the meaning of a word is its use in the language’. At this point, we wonder what is the meaning of a definition in its use in the language. In that sense, we may argue that a definition is a sort of “means” which imposes the use of itself in order to introduce new meanings. Those new meanings are not the result coming from a discussion or a negotiation among people involved in it, but rather they come from deductions logically or implicitly inferred. Thus, the definition establishes itself as a kind of rules-game. Only those who agree to comply with the rules imposed by the definition can play that game. The critical issue is that those rules-games have changed over the centuries and with cultural traditions.

The first point which deserves to be highlighted is that a definition always arrives as an attempt to answer to a specific question. In our case, the question is: What is creativity in sport? Thus, the question always precedes the answer. Furthermore, the question is a linguistic act in which something happens and the perspectives change. The question changes the weight of the things as Nietzsche claimed (Waldenfels, 2011). In ancient times, arriving to give an answer to a question required a long process in which many subjects were involved. The most famous example from the past is the so-called Socratic method (Carey & Mullan, 2004). It consisted of formulating a question to which a first answer was given by other participants. Later, the one who formulated the question, predominantly Socrates, took the given answer as thesis. In doing so, he attempted to examine the correctness of that thesis, by proposing a chain of examples and arguments directed to explain the falseness of the thesis. Socrates introduced those arguments by means of further questions to which the audience had not just to respond to it, but they had to arrive to give an assent and to approve the objections made by Socrates. In that way, the audience took actively part of the defining building process. The final definition, namely the answer to the first question they were looking for, it is the result of a long process made up of negotiations and agreements in which all the subjects are mutually involved. All this procedure required both a specific space for the encounter, and a time for the discussion.

Nowadays, on the contrary, definition imposes itself as a kind of timeless narrative fragment. Using a definition does not mean anymore to try to find a sound agreement in order to describe the reality, but definition becomes itself the reality. As a result, we give great power to the definition exemplified by its authoritative and dogmatic tones which, succeeding in hiding its implicit antecedents, provide definition with undeserved ontological nobility (Masoni, 2010). Two concepts need to be clarified: with the expression ‘implicit antecedents’ I mean the aforementioned Socratic process of negotiation of meanings and the mutually questions/answers

exchanges. Further, the expression ‘undeserved ontological nobility’ means that definition passes from the linguist to the ontological realm, and thus what definition affirms becomes what the reality actually is. This is extremely useful and advantageous, because whereas agreement requires a hard work of dialectic negotiations of beliefs and certainties, definition does not. In that regard, it exactly represents the causes of degeneration of the Socratic dialectic method into eristic, namely the will to win at any cost regardless of acquiring knowledge. Therefore, the empowerment of the definition is the starting point for the born and the development of eristic.

As long as we conceive definition as a sort of norm, the unavoidable consequence is that we think that we begin our analysis handling a certain data, rather than a social consensus. We should not make the mistake in underestimating the current power of definitions: they are highly persuasive and fill our world with empty words, uncertain names and given for granted categories which push away our possibilities of authentic comprehension. Aiming to avoid that overturning, it is necessary to recover the sense of temporality and temporariness implicit within the definition, in other words the fact that it is born from a dialog and a series of agreements historically determined. Particularly, scientific methods are used to give different names to definition such as paradigm, law, principle, postulate, axiom and so on in order to utilize its rhetorical power. As far as definition concerns within the scientific method, it is considered worthwhile to underline that science does not love temporality. That is precisely the critique asserted by Thomas S. Kuhn (Corvi, Kuhn & Gattei, 2001) and his conceptualization of paradigm. To be clear, it allows to understand that it has no more sense to acknowledge science as a linear pathway which leads to a progress designed to reach an always more accurate ‘truth’. Rather, as well explained in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, 1962) the American philosopher argues that whether a kind of scientific progress exists it has to be understood as an increase of scientific specialization and structuring. Moreover, Kuhn states that the science is developed by a determined community, therefore, science is fundamentally a social fact.

In light of the concepts above, it is necessary to re-consider the definition as a rhetorical tool which legitimately belongs to a specific literary genre, namely narration. It might be useful to introduce the difference broadly adopted by common sense between real-world and narration. The former consist of a series of narrations which seem or has become real, the latter is a series of narrations not yet believed as real (Masoni, 2010). The core difference concerns that a narration, to be conceived as real, namely a narration of the real-world, it has to be able to hide its contesting, dialectic and agonistic origins. There exists a further argument which would confirm that the definition is a specific literary genre. That is, by means of a definition I might try to explain what Platonic Hyperuranion is to someone who completely ignores what it is. Nevertheless, she will easily understand that I am defining something by means of a definition. She will be able to recognize the literary genre called definition. Sometimes it is associated with the explicit title of ‘definition’, but it can be also recognized since it has peculiar characteristics such as its premises, its unquestionable character, its lapidary content and its legislative sound.

Generally, nowadays we are totally accustomed to utilize and to be persuaded by a definition. Accepting a narration/definition means accepting to play a kind of game whose rules are established by the definition itself. It has specific recognizable characteristics which own a great persuasive power. Its biggest power is to reify, namely to regard anything abstract as something concrete, real and tangible. In doing so, a well narrated tale provides people of consciousness state modifications, as well as a definition provides people of an institutionalized and legitimate starting point from which theoretical and logical argumentations may begin.

The purpose of the following section is to analyse some characteristics and criteria of creativity found in the related literature. Finally, I will use those arguments above mentioned about definition as rhetorical tool in order to understand what creativity is, or, it is better to say, what we actually deem when we exclaim: “what a creative player!”.

3. Characteristics and criteria of creativity

Authors such as Lacerda & Mumford (2010), Hopsicker (2011), Aggerholm, Jespersen & Ronglan (2011) and Campos (2014) provide different characteristics and criteria that an action or a production should have in order to be creative. Such characteristics randomly merged together establish that being creative is a matter of producing something new, appropriate, generative, and influential, as well as regards divergent thinking, originality, unpredictability and goal oriented actions. Furthermore, Umberto Galimberti (1992) in his *Dictionary of Psychology* adds a property of fundamental relevance as far as our purposes concern, namely legality. The criterion of originality, as well as all the other criteria which identify any creative act, are not sufficient if they are dissociated from a general form of legality which allows other people to recognize that action as a creative one. The concept of legality needs to be better investigated but it is of primary importance if we aim to leave a conception of creativity as something concerning novelty, originality, unpredictability and all the other characteristics. Simply put, legality defines respect, adjustment and adaptation of some individual specificity to some general known rules. Whether a person complies with the rules she is within the legality, otherwise she is outside. In football, if a player, goalkeeper excluded, passes the ball to a teammate using his/her hands, the action will be not considered as a creative one. Rather, the using hands pass will be regarded as an illegal action. It is exactly at this point that what we have stated in the previous paragraph about the definition as a specific literary genre having peculiar rules, will provide us of some arguments capable of explaining our idea of creative act. Those arguments concern the aforementioned concept of legality and some consequences related to it. A thorough analysis of the concept leads us to unveil the vicious circle in which the definition game is played:

- a definition sets the game-rules, namely what is and what is not creativity;
- an action is considered as creative both if it respects those rules, and if others who know those rules are able to acknowledge that action as legal, namely if it respects the rules.

That vicious circle may be broken if we do not become trapped in modes of expression that, by means of the use general terms, aim to designate the necessary presence of something. In doing so, those general modes of expression such as a definition, end up indicating more than what is evident in the things that it encompasses (Gunnell, 2014).

As far as our purposes concern, the starting point is to agree with the idea that a definition is a specific literary genre which aims to hide its own narrative nature in order to seem a sound and faithful mirror of reality. If we accept that idea and we apply it to the different definitions of creativity, we should be able to understand that creativity it's not concretely something in itself. Rather, it takes the form in what is established by one of the several definitions and it actualize itself in the moment when others acknowledged it as such according to the definition rules. Indeed, a definition doesn't state what creativity actually is. It establishes criteria and borders within which an act should be acknowledged as creative. Those criteria and borders constitute that space of legality which has to be defined, guaranteed and respected by anything or anyone which aims to be recognized as creative. This process seems to produce an unavoidable consequence which consists of an overturning of the temporality sequences. In other words, there is not the creativity, or a creative act, and then its definition. Rather, the definition and the conception of creativity which its criteria and rules seem to precede the creative act itself.

In light of the above comments, a definition is an arbitrary and a linguistic act, thus we should acknowledge that an act is creative simply when it is called as creative. In other words, displaying of creativity means actualizing actions which, according with the definition rules, are capable of being recognized as creatives. If all that is rationally true, all concepts such as novelty, unpredictability, influential, generative etc. are concepts that somehow are already known. Put it

differently, any product of an action called creative act is, somehow, already known in order to be acknowledged as such. There is nothing of novelty, invention or generation in a creative act. Rather, that aspect which seems new, invented or generative was already known. It just asks for being acknowledged and recognized as such (Masoni, 2010). It would be impossible to recognize it, if it was something completely unknown. On the contrary, it was already there, available behind the scene, ready to be seen and recognized, and when it is displayed and actualized complying with definition rules, it finally is acknowledged as creative. It is interesting to note that the acknowledgement regard others. It requires others. A creative act is such just when other people acknowledge it as such. Creativity needs to be acknowledged, as well as a creative act requires others who recognize it as such. It means, others have to find and to distinguish in it those criteria which follow the definition rules.

In conclusion, creativity is not anything new, invented or generated, rather a creative act is what seems to be creative since, complying with the definition rules, it is deemed as creative. We understand that such a conclusion seems to be another tautology. We began our paper questioning the validity of those processes which, starting from a definition of creativity, aimed to establish what creativity is. Those procedures, although logically correct, don't seem able to add anything in order to understand creativity. Furthermore, all of them consider creativity as concretely something. On the contrary, our idea is that creativity is just what is deemed as such. If the reader thinks that it is, as a matter of fact, another tautology, the principle of identity, detailed explained in the next paragraph, will hopefully provide us of some sound arguments and insights capable of considering our conclusion as worthy of consideration.

4. The law of identity

The law of identity is one of the three core principles which characterize logic within the philosophical tradition. Moreover, it is associated with the law of non-contradiction (given two propositions "A is B" and "A is not B", those propositions are mutually exclusive), and with the law of excluded middle (for any proposition, either that proposition is true, or its negation is true) (Russell, 2015). For our purposes, we will focus on the first law of logic in order to understand why our thesis, namely that creativity is not concretely something, but rather it is what is established by the definition itself of creativity, it is not a mere tautology. Furthermore, we may consider the law of identity as the mother of all the definitions. Put differently, a definition is possible on the basis of the implicit and tacit agreement with the law of identity – as well as the other two principles. However, at this stage we set aside the issue concerning the other two laws, because, in a definition process, when authors define what creativity is and others do the same arriving to different results, either one definition is true and the other is false, or vice versa. As a matter of fact, we have already quoted several definitions, each one differs pretty much from the others.

In its basic form the law of identity is formulated as follow: given A than $A = A$. Undoubtedly, that formula concerns the equivalence. Does it mean that given A, than any A is identical to another A? Is this really what the law of identity aims to establish? Following the Martin Heidegger's analysis (1969) of that principle the answer is clearly no, it is not. The German philosopher's account is primary based on the differences of words and meanings adopted by several languages in order to define the 'same'. It is said *idem* by Latins, *τό αὐτό* by Greeks and it means *das Selbe* in German. When one states: "the table is table", she states a tautology. It does not add anything to knowledge in order to identify what a table is. In that way, the law of identity precisely hides what it aimed to establish. In Heidegger's view this formulation of the law of identity lacks of specificity, since it does not state A as *the same* A. In this second formula (A is *the same* A itself), the principle of identity acquires meaning and

specification since it states that a table is the same table itself. In other words, a table is itself the self-same (in German it sounds like *ist selber dasselbe*). This latter formulation implies that if A is itself the self-same is because someone has already recognized the same A as self-same. A consequence of that is that a table, in order to be the same table, it has to be recognized by others as the same table self-same. Therefore, the law of identity, whether it aims to avoid the risk of being a tautology, needs to involve the process of identification and recognition of something as the same something by someone else. Translating that sentence as far as creativity concerns, we should say: creativity is the same creativity self-same. In other words, creativity is when someone recognizes the same creativity self-same. At this stage, it should be clear why that explanation of the law of identity is useful for our purposes. Indeed, it confirms our hypothesis, that is, it is not a tautology considering creativity as those acknowledgeable acts or products which the definition itself establishes as creative acts or products.

Moreover, the issue concerns how people are capable of recognizing an act or a product as results of a creative process. The answer seems to be that people consider an act or a product as creative on the basis of their previous idea of what creativity is, namely on the basis of their previous conscious or unconscious conception of creativity, in other words, on the basis of their implicit definition. It happens to a layperson as well as to any scientific researcher. The latter examines creativity on the basis of what concerns his research field, therefore on the ground of a sort of given definition. In doing so, he looks just for those aspects which are already implicitly given by his theoretical approach. Few examples will help to make it clear. Theorists who focus on explanations of personality differences regarding creative processes will mostly emphasize aspects related to personality traits, cognitive models and behaviours; conversely, social researchers will pay more attention on social and contextual influences which determine a creative behaviour; finally, sports philosophers will analyse what is creativity in sports fields, or which factors contribute to define a sport action or a player as a creative one, or which characteristics has a body acting creatively, and so on. Undoubtedly, all those examples have their own sound arguments and justifications. It is not our will to invalidate those procedures. Rather, we aim to affirm that every procedure which examines a phenomenon is valid within its own research field since it takes into account only those aspects related to its own interests. As a consequence of that, arriving to definition is an attempt to define a phenomenon both including some aspects, and excluding others. Therefore, a definition, in spite of its authoritative character, should not be confused with reality or, even worse, with truth. Rather, it is an attempt to describe or explain a given phenomenon, considered from a unique specific perspective. Its final form is the result of a long process of questioning/answering/negotiating among interested people who look for the most satisfying and widely sound agreement on something.

Finally, this long excursus concerning the law of identity should contribute to clarify the role of the definition. In its formulation, a definition necessarily involves the law of identity. The latter, as Heidegger wisely explained, needs to be recognized by others in order to produce a meaning. Moreover, it establishes those accepted borders and criteria with which is possible to acknowledge a given phenomenon as such, and not as anything else.

5. Permits to sports creativity

The arguments are not unique as far as creativity in sport concerns. The whole theoretical dissertation we faced above was an attempt to explain that creativity in sport contest depends on the idea of creativity that people have. At the same time, a paper which aims to establish what is creativity in sport should explicitly declare that its argumentations are valid only within the conceptual framework adopted by the authors. As we have shown, the conceptual framework is

mostly established by means of a definition. It has both the power to impose itself as a fragment of the reality, and to hide its historical and dialectical origins.

In any case, once we agree with the fact that creativity needs to be acknowledged by others according to a previous idea owned or imposed by a definition, we may find some specific permits, in other words, laissez-passers, which allow people to recognize something as creative within the sport contest. What follows is a classification of different kinds of laissez-passers (Masoni, 2010):

- permit of the genius: if the one who is performing is thought and considered as a kind of creative player, people who have such opinions will judge his actions and will label him as creative although he is doing nothing so special to deserve it.
- permit of the stereotype: if someone has already an idea on her mind about what a creative player ought to be than, every time a common action satisfies the minimum requirements represented by the stereotype, it will be classified as a creative action, and the player as a creative player, disregarding its effectiveness and its validity.
- permit of the context: the same action equally performed at the same time both in a very important sport context, and in low level categories, will be considered the former as a creative action and the latter as normal or a lucky action.
- permit of definition: given a list criteria and characteristics which define what is creativity, people will be more incline to consider as creative those players and those actions which respect the previous criteria and characteristics. What people do is to merged what they are watching with the known criteria and characteristics.
- permit of family-resemblance: it is akin to the definition one. Considering creativity as a family which include different aspects and characteristics, people will be inclined to find in an action those resemblance aspects and characteristics which define it as creative.
- permit of media: all the medias and the means of communication have the power to establish and to decide whether something deserves to be considered as creative or not. People are highly and easily influenced by medias and means of communication, thus the former will evaluate as creative what medias have independently established it has to be.

These permits serve to indicate that creativity is a concept which naturally slips away from any form of definition or categorization. The reason is that such a concept is changeable, variable and uncertain. It depends on many aspects which in turns change their value according to personal, historical, cultural and social shifts. A same action might be considered either as foolish, or normal or creative in three different historical periods, in three different socio-cultural places, and by different people of the same time and place. Therefore, creativity is not something in itself, it is not a sort of gift or a set of specific abilities. It does not even concern what is new or unpredictable, since a product to be considered as creative has to be acknowledged as such and people cannot recognize what they completely ignore. Rather, the concept of creativity responds to a series of many changeable and dynamic variables historically and socio-culturally determined. Knowing them means to first comprehend what one has to achieve within sport in order to be considered as a creative player. This could also be relevant to music, drama or art.

In conclusion, the reasons above seem to indicate that it is not a big deal to establish any kind of dogmatic theory of creativity. Hopefully, we have been able to argue that creativity might be better explained on the basis of what is conventionally believed and acknowledged as creative by people who are able to recognize that as such, according to the rules expressed by the definition or by their conscious or unconscious idea of it.

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