

Essay part1

This part of the essay will go into questions which I find relevant to answer. Most of this part is written before the flashmob and edited later.

Feedback on Ximpel

Displaying a lot of different uses for the framework is an awesome idea and the sooner this is shown to the students the better. Furthermore, I was irritated by the fact that the user is not able to scroll through the time bar while watching (YouTube) movies. In some cases (mine for example) this is a welcome add-on. Also, it is confusing where everything of Ximpel is documented (is it ximpel.net? the blog? The pimsite?). I did not have trouble finding it (I mean one and a half hours of searching do a lot of good), but a warning beforehand about that the student is advised to actively bookmark links he or she deems important would have been helpful.

Project Description

Joyce, Melvin and some friends and some friends of friends will go to the Dam Square and will host an open mic for anyone who wants to have a party right there and then! The idea is to create such a good atmosphere that it will be interesting to film.

The video application will consist of two camera views, in which the user can determine every second which camera view he wants to watch. By doing this the user is not just watching a movie, but he or she is acting like a person in the crowd moving from place to place to see what's going on there and what kind of musical stuff we are up to.

Why this project?

To put it short: I want to film spontaneity. At the moment of writing I do not have a clue if there will be any spontaneity at Dam Square (practically speaking I do not even know if it will be Dam Square). But if there is spontaneity we will capture it! Most importantly, it seems like fun to do!

What have I learned from this course?

Even though we had to build a video application, in my opinion building a video application is not the point of this course. Therefore, my first priority of focus is the viral video. Creating a viral video with the productivity that I am having now allows me to understand a lot more about the creation of a viral video and I believe that the skills of creating viral videos will be needed in my future career for online marketing purposes. Ironically in retrospect, the least time went into the viral video regarding editing and production. Furthermore, my second choice of focus is building the portfolio website. I realized (as did the teacher) that online presentation is an invaluable skill to have. So the goal here is to become as proficient as possible in PHP, CSS, HTML and jQuery in four weeks. This did take a lot of my time since I never used PHP as an object oriented language before and I wanted to stretch the limits of CSS, which I succeeded in, since this website is the most beautiful in chrome and the least in Internet Explorer. Finally, the least priority of focus is the video application. This means that most of my creative output will actually be shown in: the viral video, the website and the flashmob event itself. Still, the video application is a good demonstration about watching an event happening from different perspectives.

How did the promotion go?

Too much reliance on Facebook

In short, Facebook is a good tool to communicate, however, we relied on it too much. This resulted in 50% attendance of the people who promised to come to the flashmob. On another note, flexibility was a big factor due to the nature of the event. In retrospect more thorough communication structures had to be developed because of that (e.g. having everyone's phone number and email).

Promo video

We also made a promotion video, however, due to the short nature of the school project the promotion video did not have the desired impact. We neither expected that this would happen, we created the promotional video for fun and learning purposes.

How did the teamwork go?

The teamwork went great. I was expecting to do this all by myself and I got a partner a few days after the first lecture. Before I got my partner I decided to make this a twenty something project by inviting friends to the flashmob. Everyone helped in a small way by giving suggestions and filming tips, for example.

When my team partner Joyce joined the project, she was joining an idea that was almost fully developed by me and because she is doing two university programmes I did not expect nor required a lot of effort from her side. She gave more effort than I expected and helped with setting up the presentations. Most importantly, in projects like these one has got to take the lead and the other one has to follow. Joyce did this excellently, meaning we did not argue about things in the project and because of that I was able to express my creativity to the fullest.

Why am I studying at the VU?

The first time when this question was asked I decided to quit university. However, after ten seconds I remembered that I have a list of 35 reasons for being on the VU studying information science. It also occurred to me that I did not remember more than one reason. Furthermore, I did know that if I would read the list that I would be convinced by all the reasons that I have. So I will not digress in this essay why I am here, I know why I am here and if I do not know why I am here, some piece of paper which written by me does.

How does this subject correspond to my identity?

Looking back at the lectures I notice that my love for recognizing spontaneity is a part of my identity (whatever that means). This is because I believe that people in general are a bit distant from each other, sometimes for no good reason. I like to play with this believe and see how people react and behave when a spontaneous person who they do not know is talking to them. The results are interesting, which is shown in my viral video and video application.

Essay part2

This part of the essay attempts to shed light on the question “what is spontaneity?” through various perspectives. This question is being answered to some detail because we attempted to film spontaneity in all forms possible, it was the main thing that Joyce and I were doing. For more justification see the bold header “why this project?” in part 1.

What is spontaneity? – A quick Google search

When doing a quick Google search on the topic it is apparent that the dictionary sites almost have taken over the reign of all possible search results. Apparently, the dictionary is king in Google when it comes to spontaneity, especially the English word, the Dutch word had more variety in its results.

A few definitions alongside with information from interviews I held with students

The Dutch dictionary (van Dale) says the following about spontaneity: without constraint, out of own movement/free will (Dutch: uit eigen beweging).

Definition of the first interviewed student

A 2nd year psychology student defines it as the following: direct initiative and action combined with a positive energy. It has to be stated that this definition is a subjective one according to him, meaning that the subject being spontaneous (lets call him Bob) does not have to have initiative and action combined with a positive energy - objectively speaking. However, the subject observing (lets call her Mary) the spontaneous person has to perceive Bob as being spontaneous. So for example, Mary perceives Bob as a spontaneous person, even though in reality Bob is trying to irritate Mary.

Definition of the second interviewed student

A student who’s now studying one of the masters in psychology had the following to say (paraphrase): being spontaneous means that you do something without having it planned and without an external force that’s driving you to do it. You are not obligated to do it, but you just do it. This is because it feels good to do it. You did not say beforehand “alright I’m going to do this.” No, basically you just do it and it feels good.

Furthermore he added: one interesting thing about concepts such as spontaneity is that there is a difference between an emotional state and a personality trait. This means that people who are introvert can still feel spontaneous and be spontaneous from time to time.

Finally he said: another interesting phenomenon is that people will not help other people if there are a lot of people in the vicinity of the person. This is because no one really feels responsible enough to take action. This is a social psychological effect called the bystander effect.

Interestingly enough I myself (Melvin) witnessed the bystander effect in the classroom as well when the teacher asked “are there any questions?”

My own experience

Spontaneity has a lot to do with being not inhibited, which is a part of the definition which the van Dale gave. Furthermore it also has a lot to do with not acting like a complete lunatic (e.g. a drunk person has the former but not the latter). However, this raises the following question: when is someone not acting like a complete lunatic? Or to put it in more general terms: what does being normal entail?

A question like this gives the assumption that spontaneity is a subjective experience for the observer. An actor could be perceived as spontaneous, while the actor himself has the feeling that he is not spontaneous at all, but just going through the motions. In this respect I agree with the first student who I interviewed.

So what is spontaneity?

Here is an example: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-t286uCR9A&feature=player_embedded

My guess is that most people who were giving me a high five found it spontaneous, because it took them out of the normal way of being. I know, I am that good 😊 (just kidding). However, for me the spontaneous part was more about dealing with the unexpected reactions from people.

Spontaneity and the flashmob

The interview with the second student took place before Joyce and I did the flashmob. I took notice of the bystander effect and I tried to break it by talking to people directly. What happened was the following: people responded favorably and nice towards me, however, they did not always comply towards my requests which could involve public humiliation in their perception. If I would not have talked to them most of them would have just passed by. So next time when I would like to have people perform I would have to devise a way to set the mood in such a way that possible (imagined) public humiliation is not on their minds.

Improv comedy and spontaneity

A big organization that organizes a lot of flashmobs is called ImprovEverywhere (they get a lot of hits on youtube). It led me to the idea that improv comedy and spontaneity are closely related. This means that in order to become more spontaneous one could take improv classes in order to increase their spontaneity. For the definition of improv comedy click this link:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Improv_isational_theatre.

Here is one of the flashmobs of Improv Everywhere:

<http://improveverywhere.com/2008/01/31/frozen-grand-central/>.

In conclusion

I could go on and on about this subject, but this is not a psychology paper. Neither am I trying to work out how to become spontaneous. The answer to that is easy: follow some improv comedy workshops and stay present to your environment. Furthermore, a perfect scholarly article about spontaneity is not for me, I am more of a practitioner. For a better introduction at the topic read the book Impro from the author Keith Johnstone. An example of more spontaneity is the flashmob itself (http://www.few.vu.nl/~im1129/ximpel30_advanced/ximpelApp-online.html).

I also tried do sketch spontaneity on a piece of paper: <http://www.cs.vu.nl/~eliens/create/@slide-image-pim-vs-img015.html>

Essay part 3

The aftermath – How did the flashmob go?

Before the flashmob – mustering up the courage

At the day of the flashmob I did not feel like doing it at all. Furthermore, I was really tired because of a severe lack of sleep. In short, I was looking for courage and a feeling of being awake.

The feeling awake part was solved pretty quick: Red Bull. For the courage part I devised a little plan that day which resulted in another viral video than intended, the original viral would have been a compilation video of the flashmob. But the current viral video shows a movie in which I am high fiving people and just goofing around. This was to warm myself up for getting the courage to do the flashmob and perform on Rembrandt Square.

While giving high fives to random people in Amsterdam I got rejected at around 20 to 25 percent from all the people I intended to give a high five. This experience gave me a few pointers on how to deal with rejection, which is: just make fun with the idea of having the rejection! I did not incorporate the rejections in the video, but I made a game out of counting the first five people who gave a rejection to me. Thanks to the switch in mentality I felt more easy going about the flashmob.

The organization of the flashmob

Organizing the flashmob was a big challenge in itself. I had to consider all possible types of scenario's. What to do if not many people would show up? What to do if the location is a mess and rainy? But my biggest question was the following: how on EARTH do I get an amplifier which does not need a 230 volt socket to draw power from?

In retrospect I thought too light about this challenge, if I would know now what I did not know back then I would reconsider the thought of doing this project, because virtually no one has such an amplifier unless you buy one for around €250 or more. Unfortunately, I did not have a spare €250 and I did not know anyone who had such an amplifier.

The solution came in the form of a deus ex machina, which is a phrase used by my drama teacher in high school. It is Latin for “god out of a machine” and it means that a god (or godlike) character will appear in the play and give a good or bad ending to a story (e.g. you are hanging on a cliff and only God could lift you up). My deus ex machina was my father (godlike? No but his powers were!). He did know someone who has such an amplifier on a walking frame (Dutch: rollator)!

Two other issues which Joyce and I ran across were the location of doing the flashmob and the law. What we did (performing with an amplifier without a permit) was illegal and two artists were performing on Dam Square, which made it not feasible to perform on Dam Square. Fortunately, we had backup plans location wise. However, Bram (the guy with the walker frame amp) wanted explicit conformation from the café's on Rembrandt Square that it was okay to perform in front of them.

This was a last minute rush job, so I just decided to tell them that we were going to do it anyway and they said “okay, I am curious to hear what kind of music it is.” If the police would come Joyce and I would have shown that it was for a school project and in addition I would have said that we had informal consent from the café managers of every involved cafe in the neighborhood (which was true).

Possible improvements

Two things went wrong. First, the third camera guy deleted his movie files by accident. Second, the location was a bad place to do the flashmob. It was bad because there was not a lot of people going through that location. In the flashmob movie it is shown that a lot of people are watching from a distance on the nearby market. However, these two difficulties were not problems of such magnitude that they had a big negative impact on this project.

Footage of the flashmob / open mic

For people interested in the raw footage of the flashmob here it is (the footage is not findable through the youtube search engine).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHvpEqhgr0o> - cam1 part 1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Cplv4FPtpU> – cam1 part 2

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qnngc_47aZ4 – cam2 part 1

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVP-HIF_EuA – cam2 part 2

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVR2byWQ08w> – intro