

BECOMING AN ARTIST

Sol Morén

BECOMING AN ARTIST

Abstract:

How do you *become* an Artist? When and why during education or career do you begin to experience yourself as an Artist? How is artistic knowledge transferred?

The aim of this research project is to investigate how contemporary artists become Artists and which factors in the relational environment that are crucial for the artistic identification process.

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Key Words:

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Resumen:

¿Cómo te has convertido en un artista? ¿Cuándo y por qué durante la educación o la carrera que usted comienza a experimentar a ti mismo como artista? ¿Cómo se transfiere el conocimiento artístico?

El objetivo de este proyecto de investigación es investigar cómo contemporáneo artists've ser artistas y que toma en cuenta el entorno relacional que son cruciales para el proceso de identificación artística.

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Palabras clave:

dentidad artística; dialogismo, creatividad, zación ción;
performatividad;

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Imagine a successful workshop, where students start acting in a creative way by collaborating, sharing ideas, inspiring and encouraging each other. The knowledge of how to make this situation happen, may not necessarily be easy to reflect upon or to transfer into text. For me, it was not until I started working with Art Teachers Education that I felt a need to try to communicate this silent or tacit and mainly unreflected knowledge. I started thinking to myself that perhaps artists have some kind of knowledge of how to make creativity occur in a group of people, this might be interesting, not only for my students but for other teachers and researchers.

It was not until I began to work in artistic projects together with people educated in others fields than Fine Art that became aware of my own identity as an Artist, so the reasons for addressing the question of becoming an Artist has grown out of my experiences of research and development work in other fields, like ICT and Education¹. Presently I am working as an assistant professor at the *Department of Creative Studies*, where the main concerns are in

¹ In the beginning of the 2000's I was working as an artist/researcher for the Swedish *Interactive Institute* with a research focus on Art and Technology.

² Webpage for Creative Studies at Umea University: <http://www.estet.umu.se/english>

³ This type of literature is written by practitioners in psychology and from various forms of therapy, not primarily for the research field but rather for a broader audience, as students and peer practitioners.

⁴ The Swedish Government has furthermore added an important goal for higher education and

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Educational research of Art, Crafts and Music². My main task is to inspire renewal of the Art Teachers education in the area of Contemporary Art such as e.g. Conceptual art and Relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002; Kwon 2002) and to enhance the use of new media and ICT.

Artistic Pedagogy

In what ways can you provide for learning environment that promotes creativity? In what ways can artistic freedom be perceived? Do artists create their own pedagogy? If so, how is that done and from where do artists get their ideas? Questions that I asked myself during the period of practical artistic development work, for instance with the projects *SoundImages* (Morén 2013) and *SoundLandscapes* became the starting point for a preparatory research for this thesis, with the initial working title *Artistic Pedagogy*. The original aim was to investigate transition of knowledge in artistic and creative processes, individually and collectively.

During the preparatory research process my perspectives, questions and aims have been influenced by the knowledge of the artists and researchers that I have had dialogues together with, something which has resulted in new questions. How is artistic knowledge transferred? Could creativity be seen as not only a personal skill, but a collaborative or collective process? Which conceptions, are used by contemporary artists to frame the role of the contemporary artist e.g. artistic freedom, creativity, genius, collaboration, networking or public recognition? ? Is it possible to agree on a common understanding of artistic freedom? In what ways do you need to perform, to become a contemporary artist? How can you internalize the identity of the artist? Can the notion of an artistic identity be understood as a performative role, growing from the act of doing art? Which factors in the relational environment are of importance for the artistic identification process? How do you become an Artist?

² Webpage for Creative Studies at Umea University: <http://www.estet.umu.se/english>

OBJECTIVES

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How do you *become* an Artist? When and why during education or career do you begin to experience yourself as an Artist? How is artistic knowledge transferred?

The aim of this research project is to investigate how contemporary artists become Artists and which factors in the relational environment that are crucial for the artistic identification process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychology & Psychoanalyses

I have just recently decided to use the Theory of Mind (Fonagy 2002) with the concept of Mentalization as the main analyzing theory and the reason for this is that this theory summerizes most of the diverse theoretical material that I have priorly used. The theoretical reading and focus during the preparatory period has been oriented towards Psychology and Psychoanalyses (Fanon, 1967; Fromm, 1991; Fromm & Suzuki & De Martino 1960; McWilliams 1999;) and Visual therapy (Cullberg Weston, 2008; Feder & Feder 2008; Killick, 1997; Kramer 1971;)³. A multidisciplinary theoretical framework would be preferable for the investigation of *Becoming an Artist* partly because that is the way practising studio artists relate to theory, as the fictive borders of the more theoretical part of the Academic field has not yet been properly marked on the Fine Arts map, something which will probably change in the future, as a result of the Artistic Research, or using Bourdieus terminology territorialisation, of the novel field (Bourdieu 1974). For instance, some references from Sociology and Gender theory will be crucial to balance and update the Psychoanalytic perspective, just like Deleuze and Guattari suggested in *Anti-Oedipus*

³ This type of literature is written by practitioners in psychology and from various forms of therapy, not primarily for the research field but rather for a broader audience, as students and peer practitioners.

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(1984). As the focus of the research will be not only on artistic and creative processes but on the formation of the artistic identity, theories of performativity, as in Judith Butlers writings (1999) or on the problem of internalisation of the image of the other, as in Franz Fanons (1964) research will be useful.

Theories of Creativity

Is creativity really an individual skill? Or is more like a collective intelligence? The myth of the Genius (Eysneck 2000) is has played an important role in the history of Art, but today the theories of connectivness (Siemens 2006) and distributed intelligence (Nancy 2000) practical intelligence (Kaufmann & Sternberg 2006) relational learning (Irwin 2008) and collective creativity (Becker 1982) might help us to continue the questioning of the concept of the singular unique Genius. To analyse the function of creative processes in the development of the artistic identity theories of creativity, as Rollo Mays (1975) classical work revealing the creative process, as well as Howard Gardners (1982) more recent questionings of our understanding of intelligence or rather intelligences and creativity. Although I find it problematic that Gardner (2004) in some senses equals creativity and genius, he lists some interesting factors that seems to be crucial for the development of creativity, that in some ways contradicts the concept of the individual creative genius. For instance an early exposure to people who are comfortable with taking chances, a family that tolerates rebellion and peers that are willing to experiment and who are not afraid of failure.

Grounded Theory

The theoretical framework will be selected according to how the research questions evolves during the research process, as in Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2013; Denzin & Lincoln 2009). The artists and researchers that I have talked to so far, have all contributed to the bibliography, as I have asked them about their influences. Every dialogue will influence the choice of the theoretical framework as the informants recommend or refer to key literature that

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in most cases is necessary need to read, to fully understand their line of thoughts.

As the theoretical framework is developed in dialogue with the interviewed artists and researchers, this may be considered grounded in the research process. To use grounded theory is necessary if you look upon theories as tools in a toolbox, to be of practical use to deconstruct and reflect upon the collected research data. For example, in May 2013 I interviewed the psychologist and researcher Simon Kyaga who is involved in a research project concerning the link between creativity and mental illness at Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm. As a result of this I decided to use some of the literature on creativity that he suggested, for example Hans Eysnek (1995). The idea to focus on Erich Fromms perception of freedom, to investigate the concept of artistic freedom was born during an interview with two young student of *the Art Academy of Umea*, in May 2013. The students mentioned the challenge of structuring you time, especially during their first year at the Art Academy, something that reminded me that I was influenced by Fromms book *The escape from freedom* (1943) during the years when I was a student at the Art Academy, and this influenced the choice of using Erich Fromms theories of how freedom must be conquered.

METHODOLOGY

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method frequently used in humanistic and social sciences e.g. ethnography or postmodern feministic research (Lykke 2009). The idea is to look for several small contextualized stories, that together could form a pluralistic picture, rather than searching for the historically well known meta-narratives, so that the researcher is less likely to fall into the trap of fulfilling socio-normative expectations. Artistic research methods go well together with narrative inquiry, as they are action based, performative and situated in the artists own process of production (Hughes 2011). The researcher is seen as a subject, situated together with the object of research in a specific time and place situation, where all of these parts are dependent upon each other to create a temporary image of reality (Carson & Sumara 1997).

Auto Ethnography

To position myself as a researcher in the specific context that I am studying, meta-reflection and auto-ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Margolis & Pauwels 2011; Pink 2007) will be used to reveal and

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reflect upon how my prior life experiences as an art student; practising artist and researcher influences the conducted research. In the research process my own experiences as a student of the *Academy of Fine Arts* in Sweden in the 1990's will be used as well as those from a research and teaching perspective. The idea of researching art and education from multiple perspectives, as an artist, teacher and researcher has been used by some interesting contemporary researchers in the art-based research community (Irwin 2008; Springgay 2004; Suominen 2003) In the process of meeting other artists in the dialogues I also meet myself again, at different possible pasts and futures. The way I have solved collaborative work during the years has so far been un-reflected, but during this artistic research process I will reflect upon my own methods as well as other artists methods. This meta reflective process will be written down, drawn on the studio walls or on pieces of paper specially designed for this purpose, recorded with Iphone or sampled from the internet as for instance, conversations via Skype that I have with my Supervisor, Teresa Torres de Eca.

Arts-based and Artistic research

Methodologically, one ideas for the Phd working process is to try to use an artistic approach to research. Artists who begin with artistic research after a long career as professional artists, seems to be facing a problem with duality, where the artistic production and the academic text within the research, becomes two separated processes. Some hypothesis for this dualistic division may be found in cognitive science, as we seem to be using different parts of the brain for tasks using different senses (Damasio 2000). Sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu (1990) or Gender Theory e.g. Judith Butler (1999) might provide a different hypothesis for this dualistic division, yet not necessary contradictory, as according to contemporary Psychology ACT and KBT theories, the structures of the brain changes when we act repeatedly in a novel way (Hayes 2005).

During the pre-project I have observed that many artists, including myself, seem to have a problem with academic writing, not in the sense that we find it difficult to express ourselves, but in the way that we quite often try to be "super-academic" and as a result of this lose faith in our own artistic language. With his in mind I will try to keep the research process as open as possible, and let my findings along the

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way influence the path just as I would if I was doing art. I will be using artistic methods to collect research data, referring to artistic research methodology (Gray & Mailis 2004; Holly 2008; Sullivan 2010). From just a quick overview of the theoretical writings on artistic research, from the last twenty years (Ahlbäck 2011; Elkins 2009; Hannula & Souranta & Vadén 2005), I get the impression that in many cases the texts are written by theorists who have an art theoretical, philosophical or art historic background. I have found that more seldom, the actual framework for artistic research and methodology is being problematized by artists with an Mfa in studio art. To look at the concept of artistic research from a theorists perspective I suppose is quite different than to survey the same topic from an artist practitioners perspective. To get a complementary, artists' perspective I will study some of the contemporary artistic projects and artistic Phd-projects using similar methodologies, that is narrative enquiry auto-ethnography and arts-based research (Calle 2012; Kaihovirta-Rosvik 2009; Suominen 2007).

Research Instruments

The semi-structured qualitative interviews in the preparatory research project *Artistic Pedagogy* have gradually been developed into more open *Art-studio dialogues* that allows the artists to talk more freely from an initial description of the *Becoming an Artist* research project. My conception of an *Art-studio dialogue* is that it should be a dialogue on equal conditions, based on the precondition that both parts have chosen this form of sharing their experiences, hopefully, as they have an interest in talking to each other. When I was a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Sweden in the 1990's we would choose which professor to let into our studios. During the five years of the Master Program, many Swedish and international artists visited the Academy to have workshops lectures and art-studio talks. As I remember, a simple list was positioned on the wall at the main entrance, for the students to sign up to. You did not have to talk to any of the guest teachers or even to your Professors, this was optional. Of course, the guest teachers did not have the same freedom of choice when it came to which students they wanted to talk to, but most probably they had the possibility to end the Art Studio talk in advance.

By coincidence I found a description of the Dialogism that I was trying to formulate as my method of inquiry, in *Pedagogy of the Heart* by

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Paulo Freire (1997). According to Freire Dialogism can not exist in authoritarian power relations, as Dialogism is based on the mutual respect between the dialoging subjects. The authoritarian power is never curious in questioning, it asks questions for the sake of asking questions. Dialogism provides for a spirit of adventure and at the same time confidence in the questioning.

Who is chosen, and on what premises?

- Diverse artistic expressions
- Positions in the field
- Education varies, mainly Fine Art
- Geographically, Europe
- Preferable variations from a sociocultural and cultural perspective.
- Artists may be former class mates, but could also be artists that I never met before
- Artists working with Art Education at different levels, mainly University and Academy of Fine Arts
- The north of Scandinavia will likely be overrepresented
- From a gender perspective, even

The dialogues will be recorded as two sound files, and parts of the conversation will be filmed. Recorded of sound and images is done with professional and semi-professional equipment. Sound recording includes microphones and pre-amps generating radio quality, filming a semi-professional DSLR camera Nikon D800. Sometimes an iPhone is used for environmental snap-shots. If the interviewed artists contribute with artworks like photographs from workshops or of drawings licenses for reproducing their work may be needed.

ETHICAL ASPECTS

Ethical Rules for Humanistic and Social Sciences

According to the guidelines for Humanistic Research⁴. Every person participating in the research project has the right to withdraw his or her participation at any stage of the research process, before the results of the research has been published. The participants has the right to see their participation in its context, so that they can agree or disagree to their participation, before the result is being published. In this particular research project, I offer all participants to receive the recorded material from their participation, and to use this for their own research or artistic work, if they wish. All participants are offered to be anonymous, if they wish.

⁴ The Swedish Government has furthermore added an important goal for higher education and research that may influence choices of scientific perspectives and problems: It shall support a sustainable development that creates a good, healthy environment for this and future generations, economical and social welfare and justice (Högskolelagen - Higher Education Act). Link to rules and guidelines for Swedish Researchers: <http://www.codex.uu.se/en/forskninghumsam.shtml>

EXPECTED RESULTS

Preparatory Research 2012

The preparatory investigation with the working title *Artistic Pedagogy* started in the Autumn of 2012, when I began to interview my colleges and other artists that I knew of who were working in the field of Education. At that time I had not yet decided the framework of for instance, educational level or geographical borders, rather I choose people who I thought would have something interesting to contribute with on quite subjective premises, like their artworks, previous projects or how they had expressed their ideas in text or their working situation.

So far I have conducted and recorded interviews with and *Art-studio dialogues* with sixteen artists and five researchers. The first interviews were recorded in October 2012 with Louise Lindbom, an author working with the Screen Play Writers Education at Umeå University. In November 2012, I interviewed two artists, Eva Söderström and Sofie Weibull, working as teachers at my own institution, the Department of Creative Studies. In December I continued collecting material by interviewing three artists working at the Art Teachers Education at the *Design Academy of Gothenburgh*; the Professor of *Art Teachers Department* at *Konstfack* Anette Göthlund, in Stockholm; and three artists working as pedagogues, and at a special workshop for disabled people in Stockholm called *Inuti*. Initially, in the interviews, I used Swedish as the language of verbal communication, and the

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research questions were more focused on finding out "how artists invented new pedagogy or didactics, based on their own artistic practice", a hypothesis I had constructed from reflecting upon my own pedagogic experience. During the period from October 2012 to May 2013 I was supported theoretically, by attending a multidisciplinary in-house education for the staff of Umeå University, *Writing for and about education* with regular meetings once a month. During 2013 the pilot work has continued, changing language to English for Phd-thesis and to adapt the project to an international audience. During the Autumn of 2013 the dialogues during the summer, at *Umea University* and at *the Academy of Fine Arts of Reykjavik*, Island.

Examples of practical questions from interviews:

- Tell me about a successful workshop you have created, where the students became enthusiastic and creative and worked well together
- How did the student act and react?
- What happened in the group, where the expressions of creativity?
- Do you remember how you came up with the idea for that workshop?
- What inspires your workshop methods? (workshops you have attended yourself, something you have read about, your own artistic practice)
- What is important in a course or workshop, what makes you feel satisfied?
- Do you have a special relation to some theorist, is there some method, or quoted phrase you often think of or use?
- If you should try to track down your sources of inspiration, what would they be? (art works, artists, literature, films, political issues, philosophy, art critique, childhood interests)
- How do you inspire your students to start and to get going?
- Could you please show me a picture, photo or drawing related to a successful workshop that you just told me about?

From the beginning the questions were more theoretical, but than the dialogue became vague and abstract. I changed the questions, so that the informants would start to talk about their practice, and after that perhaps they would be able to draw conclusions about the methods and references they were using. The questions asked to capture or reveal the artists methods or the artistic processes in most cases can not be the same questions as the research questions. To re-design the methods of collecting useful information during the research process

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is a way of work that is close to artistic processes. Research questions can have a high level of abstraction that is useful in a logical theoretical sense, but to get useful information from people the questions might need to be entirely different, more focused on practical outcomes and actions. According to my findings during the pilot study, designing a workshop or a course for other artists, could be a way of visualising the theoretical concepts of the act of creating, or as in Joseph Beuys statement "Thinking is form".

Presentation of results

Artists have been inventing their own methods of working since the practice of art began, both technically and conceptually. To write a *traditional* academic article or to do an *ordinary* contemporary art project on-line or in the form of an art exhibition is possible, using the results of this research project. Using hypertext is the way many people write nowadays, and for me, the artistic research process could be captured in a more equivalent way if the studio walls are extended to digital walls. The possibilities are endless and I will have to limit my structuring to a few softwares. There might be a risk in this, as the medium may influence the structuring of the sampled material, but this process of conforming, is of course already at stake when we choose to use a traditional academic text-based form. The question of digitally structuring the research material has been discussed together with a researcher from the Informatics field, Andres Lund, and will be further discussed with the designers Andrea Contino and Christina Casanova of one of the software tools I have tried to use *My Documenta*.

Artistic and Academic Presentation

Trying to use Fraylings model of categorisation, I find it hard to choose between the definitions "Research through art" or "Art-based research" regarding the structuring of the project as an action-based trial-and-error process, and in the way I choose to collect the research material with artistic professional quality of sound and image, and in the choice of structure and presenting the results as a multi-media presentation on the Internet. In some artistic Phd-thesis there seems

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to be quite a clear division between the practice based part of the research project, and the written part which is mainly focused at defending the artistic project (Hughes 2011). To avoid this partitioning of the artistic research in duality, mainly artwork and text, I will search for solutions in digital presentations for the Internet. At the moment I am testing a prototype for an online presentation framework programmed in HTML 5 and pure Javascript, where I can mix sounds from the dialogues, environmental sounds, photography, videos, graphic art and pieces of analysing text. The idea is that this online presentation format will contain the artistic result and outcomes of my thesis. One possible risk may be that the artistic process of capturing and structuring the data will appear to be separated from the analyses of the results captured and described *in* the material. The information coming from the artists, could probably be analysed and transformed to abstract theoretical and perhaps even general knowledge to be used in different academic areas, whereas the more artistic part of the project, the online-presentation, have the potential to expose more of the artistic process, methods and tacit knowledge that were developed during the research process.

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