

Application and Autonomy – The Reach and Span of Contemporary Art Didactics

Boel Christensen-Scheel¹

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

Abstract: Aesthetics, as both a variety of practices and a field of research, has now begun a journey toward society and more applied thinking – that is, how can art, art thinking, and different forms of sensuousness interact with or interfere in societal contexts. In this special issue of InFormation we explore the frame of a possible *contemporary art didactics*, where knowledge production and dispersion in and through art and aesthetics are promoted. Here the qualities of responding to societal needs and challenges are negotiated with the particular qualities of art. The field of didactics is often tied to specific teaching methods, but can also be seen as a more general theory of learning. With the term ‘contemporary art didactics’, we want to propose a relational field of communication and interaction based on aesthetic activity and competence. In addition, we seek to emphasize the contemporary quality and engagement of this activity and competence. In this first article by the editor of the issue, some of the related discussions on application, autonomy and criticality are presented alongside a proposition to formulate certain specific art based qualities.

Keywords: Aesthetics, contemporary art didactics, applied art, art’s autonomy, art criticism, criticality, awareness, art based knowledge, art based research, research in art, politics of art.

Introduction

Aesthetics, as both a variety of practices and a field of research, has now begun a journey toward society and more applied thinking – that is, how can art, art thinking, and different forms of sensuousness interact with or interfere in societal contexts. That art concerns itself with societal

¹Department of Art, Design and Drama, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, PB 4, St. Olavs Plass, N-0130. E-mail: Boel.Christensen-Scheel@hioa.no

challenges might seem obvious in current research politics oriented toward climate change and financial crises, but in fact, the applied aspect in art contains several areas of tension related to art discourse and history. Since antiquity, art has been related to non-use or use in religious and poetic situations. In addition, although part of power systems, games and rhetoric, art's function has often been tied to its non-functionality or its evasion from precisely concrete and trivial use. Its use has, roughly put, been related to its uselessness.

Meaningless work is potentially the most abstract, concrete, individual, foolish, indeterminate, exactly determined, varied, important art-action-experience one can undertake today. (De Maria, 1960, p.526)

A central question thus becomes what this “useful uselessness” consists of, and further, if this uselessness could instead be considered useful or meaningful, and how. What we consider “applied” is thus part of the discussion, and what the value of the material and immaterial production is considered to be. With reference to the above cited artist Walter de Maria, it is in these tensions between the abstract and the concrete, the indeterminate and the exactly determined, that this research compilation places itself. This points us to the field of *contemporary art didactics*, where knowledge production and dispersion in and through art and aesthetics are promoted, and where the qualities of responding to societal needs and challenges are negotiated with the particular qualities of art. The field of didactics has traditionally been tied to specific teaching methods, but can also be seen as a more general theory of learning. With the term “contemporary art didactics”, we want to propose a relational field of communication and interaction based on aesthetic activity and competence (Aure, 2006, pp.135, 148). In addition, we seek to emphasize the contemporary quality and engagement of this activity and competence. Contemporary art didactics, at the least, has a three-fold objective, directed toward art activity and competence, relational learning potential, and contemporary relevance – here, leaning on scholars who have sought to expand the notions of art education and art based research (Aure, 2011; Borgdorff, 2011; Rogoff, 2006). Note that we use the term “art based” and not “arts-based” to indicate the connection to contemporary art and art as a cross-disciplinary aesthetic field, rather than a genre-driven methodological expertise.

Critical Thinking and Applied Autonomy

Entering the twenty-first century with a foundation in critical thinking and the art discourse developing from the German philosopher Theodor Adorno's aesthetic theory, one of art's primary concerns is to present a commentary or an alternative perspective to society. This suggests a distance or an outside perspective in art, a position that gives art its so-called autonomous character.

The autonomy of works of art, which of course rarely ever predominated in an entirely pure form, and was always permeated by a constellation of effects, is tendentially eliminated by the culture industry, with or without the conscious will of those in control. (Adorno, 1972/2001, p.99)

Adorno did not claim this autonomy rigidly, thereby isolating or secluding art from societal impact, but considered a critical distance vital for art, precisely *to have* an impact or an importance in society as it changes and develops.

The double character of art – something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context – is directly apparent in the aesthetic phenomena, which are both aesthetic and *faits sociaux*... and, certainly, art always stands in need of this external perspective for protection from the fetishization of its autonomy. (Adorno, 1970/2004, p.328)

For Adorno, art is sensuous *reflection*, rather than *representation* – art lies in the picture that appears through an artistic process, not in the pictorial similarity to the depicted or to the world itself (Adorno, 1970/2004, p.110). Otherwise formulated, art's potential resides in presenting a reflected or “doubled” version of experienced reality, thereby distancing itself from the immediacy of this thought reality and creating an important societal reflexiveness. This is reminiscent of what theatre director and theoretical poet Antonin Artaud called the theatrical ability of “doubling” the non-theatrical, creating something that is perceived as more real or intense than reality itself (Artaud, 1936/1989, p.97). Bertolt Brecht, another crucial avant-garde director referred to by Adorno himself, also developed the reflexive potential of theatre through a distancing or “*Verfremdung*”, where art was not the same as life or society, but meant to create an awareness of it (Brecht, 1927/2000, p.215). Nonetheless, Brecht used this “epic” or confrontational strategy to support and develop ideology, thereby re-entering the direct political sphere that Adorno, in many ways, can be said to have avoided.

More than as a direct relationship between art and life or society, these theories can be thought to describe certain *qualities* or possibilities in art. The weight put on art's autonomy through the twentieth century could as much be traced to an interest in society and in reflexiveness as a democratic function, rather than to a distance or disinterestedness, which this autonomy was later occasionally portrayed to be. Nonetheless, what the so-called autonomy of art consists of, or leads to and why, is not entirely clear. Is autonomy something that literally excludes or frees art from the regular system, leading to the notion that the rest of society is included in one coherent system? Or is art that “anti-structure”, which ultimately confirms and legitimizes the structure, thereby totally depending on it? This confirmational critique is also touched upon by Adorno, showing the paradox of the direct critique in itself, “Yet industry makes even this resistance an institution and changes it into coin. It cultivates art as a natural reserve for irrationalism, from which thought is to be excluded.” (Adorno, 1970/2004, p.426) Here, Adorno describes the problem of the utopic in avant-garde art, the sincere wish to act and address, but the representational distance nevertheless created in such a process (Bürger, 1984).

This has also become a central element in the critique of Adorno and the Frankfurter school of critical thought. In a more recent text, “The Mis-Adventures of Critical Thought” (2009), French philosopher, Jacques Rancière, elaborates on some of the problems concerning reflexive distancing in

art, leading to demotivated exposure of flaws and crisis, and to a similar demotivated state of awareness of flaws and crisis in the spectator, but also in a demotivation regarding them. As important as critique is for the democratic structure, criticism, as a self-concerned, tale-biting story, has problematic sides (Christensen-Scheel, 2009, p.71). By reflecting on, but not taking a stand in relation to, part of the critical production creates no potentiality, no options. This demotivated autonomy and utopic paradox is also part of what led art theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud to emphasize relationality and encounters in art, and to oppose a distancing of art from society (Bourriaud, 2001). Nonetheless, his intentions, one must think, and as one must think Adorno's was, is to create an *important art*, related to societal needs and challenges.

As the questions concerning art's relationship to society cannot be easily answered, one could say that the questions themselves are an important part of art and its research. Irit Rogoff, Professor in Visual Studies, lays out terms for (art) educational pedagogy in the text "Academy as Potentiality" (2006). She problematizes the many unformulated and misformulated conceptualizations of (*art education*) as both a problem solver and a battleground in the beginning of the twenty-first century – related to romantic ideas of inspiration on the one hand and to economic interests in effectiveness on the other. In contrast, Rogoff suggests altering the vocabulary of contemporary art education based on what one could call a contemporary art theoretical or philosophical basis; however, it is also directly connected to artistic production principles:

...a set of alternate emergent terms that operate in the name of this "not-yet-known-knowledge". Terms such as potentiality, actualisation, access and contemporaneity, which for me are the building blocks and navigational vectors for a current pedagogy, a pedagogy at peace with its partiality, a pedagogy not preoccupied with succeeding, but with trying. (Rogoff, 2006, p.15)

Rogoff also emphasizes that, "the questions we ask are far more important than the answers we might provide... they are our possibility to change the basis of our thought" (Rogoff, 2006:18). Reflection is spurred by questions, and as obvious as it may seem, it is something that we often must remind ourselves of as we enter a production process. This "not-yet-known" attitude, which reluctantly seeks answers, also leads to a different perspective on critique. Here Rogoff proposes a shift from what she calls *criticism* (finding faults and exercising judgments according to a consensus of values) and *critique* (examination of underlying assumptions in order to reveal or replace a convincing logic), to *criticality* (operating from an uncertain ground of embeddedness) (Rogoff, 2006, p.17). Criticality would be to incorporate the relational and interrogative attitude in the discussion of quality in art, thus both continuing and expanding the lines of critical thought. Therefore, while not being defined as utopic or merely as a social situation, art can simultaneously be applied, relational, unsure, and critical. This foundation of negotiation does however implicate an insistence on the particular qualities of art and the particular potential of these qualities in an educational or didactic context.

Performative Potentiality

Although the tensions between applied and autonomous – and relational and critical, still exist in the arts, the amount of attention these tensions are given varies tremendously. In the practical-theoretical landscape in which we seek to make a sketch, these tensions can be overcome, or considered irrelevant, but they are not shoved under the carpet. To understand, critical thinking and critical discourse, as promoted by Adorno, have an important aesthetic as well as political function. Therefore, the critical aspects, along with the conceptual, could be seen as applied qualities that place the art discourse *in relation* to society rather than distancing itself from it.

Nonetheless, art discourse is not driven by one perspective only, at each moment in time, several different “art logics” and discourses can be identified: As parts of contemporary art through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have become increasingly immaterial or have had a specific social or educational engagement, the field of performance theory has likewise become increasingly important. As a central field of research in theatre studies, as well as in aesthetics, performance theory and theories on performativity have become a way to describe the dimension of *time* in different phenomena. Performance studies was established as a specific field of research and study in New York in the 1970s, by theatre theorist, Richard Schechner, and anthropologist, Victor Turner. The point of departure was the interpretation of theatre as a social and anthropological event, and the other way around, the understanding of non-art events, such as social and religious rituals, as containing aesthetically decipherable elements. For example, rites of passage can be read according to a dramaturgical development and simple situations of risk in everyday life can be understood as a creation of personal suspense. Further, the concept of a certain development within a given time span, based on the relationship between ‘structure’ and ‘anti-structure’, was central to their theorization (Turner, 1987, p.34). This also marked a shift in the weight from product to process, and from a particular aesthetic frame within visual arts or theatre, to the possible *movement of frames* between art, politics, religion, family, etc. (Schechner, 1988/2003, p.99, 2004). This also meant that social and anthropological perspectives could be used to understand art, and theatre theory could be used to analyze a religious ritual or a court process. The performative element in these different cases was then tied to the creation of a certain consciousness, an awareness of the behavior and its different contexts *as frames*. The theatrical action as performance is always new, as an actual action, but as a rehearsed action, it is also repeated. However, Schechner and Turner maintain that this is valid for all human actions, they all relate to established structure and previous behavior, as well as periods of anti-structure to develop, possibly change and/or confirm the structure.

What makes the behavior performative is a particular awareness of this behavior as it is executed, a condition of double consciousness of the actions, or as Schechner calls it, *as restored behavior* (Schechner, 1987, p.7, 1988/2003, p.163). This particular double awareness in art is

reminiscent of the previous discussion of Adorno, Artaud, and Brecht. Although their conceptions are each different, and perhaps indicate different choices or conclusions, the aims of their research appears to reach for a similar intellectual quality in the aesthetic and sensuous processes. I would say that the performative seeks to grasp the raising of this art-specific reflection or consciousness, which allows sensuous and social material in general to be evaluated as part of integrative structures. This is also what can be seen to give art a particular potential for “*criticality*”, using Irit Rogoff’s term (2006, p.16).

Schechner suggests five qualities of something he calls “actuals”, recalling Rogoff’s ambition of actualization. Although this does not directly overlap with performance, it can perhaps be understood as a further concretization of performance qualities: 1) *process*, something happens here and now, 2) *consequential, irremediable, and irrevocable* acts, exchanges, or situations, 3) *contest*, something is at stake for the performers and often for the spectators, 4) *initiation*, a change in status for participants, and 5) space is used *concretely* and *organically* (Schechner, 1988/2003, p.46). All of these qualities indicate aspects of a process *in time* – there is an evolvment, a change, and a consequence – of the action or event in question. This relates to a crucial point made in post-structuralist theory, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, for example, that all structures are evolving and moving, and the perspectives change from person-to-person, country-to-country, place-to-place, time-to-time, etc. The performance or event itself thus constitutes a specific constellation in time and space, though interchangeable and replaceable – but most importantly perhaps, it indicates the situational and actual character of a specific phenomenon or performance (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). Quite simplified, this means that each situation is different and constitutes a performative potential to be acknowledged in communication and didactics – this, of course, without denying the existence of larger structures and institutionalized knowledge.

Today, the performance focus is prominent in both the visual arts and in theatre, and is connected to the development of new and more complex art forms, using a variety of modes and modalities in a duration of time. In addition to the time dimension and situational perspective, an inclusion of cultural perspectives and a new weight on body and sensuousness, follows this performative development. Performance is thus not only an experimental art form; it is a theoretical apparatus apt to describe both more personal and more cultural sides of an (art) event. Here, the reopening of the field of aesthetics, as a theory of the senses, also non-artled, non-made sensuous experiences, can also constitute the material of theoretical reflections (Böhme, 2001). As we, in this context, relate to a live material, such as a contemporary cultural production – the professional training of material development and sensuous (land)scaping, awareness of non-verbal communication, critical reflection, and self-assessment, is vital. These perspectives will also be reflected in this issue’s articles; the situational and contextual competence that the performance theory has emphasized, both

in the arts and elsewhere in society, lays as a theoretical and practical framework for contemporary art didactics, in theatre, design, and the visual arts.

Aesthetic Professions and Professionalism

Based on this applied and relational, but also autonomous character, can these qualities of art and art education be tied to the exertion of different aesthetic professions and further, to an *aesthetic professionalism*? This is, in some ways, a rhetorical question, because the professions already exist – of painter, art teacher, dramaturg, performance artist, sound technician, and composer – but these “roles” or professions have been tied to a particular division of media and tasks within the art world. As the character and value of art has been questioned and debated throughout the twentieth century, so have the roles and functions of art producers. Specifically, as the projects, works, and paintings have changed their qualities, the definitions tied to them have changed equally. This means that one has sought to define art and particular art projects starting from criteria other than medium and content, and instead addressing striking social, political, and/or subject oriented qualities. However, the *titulations* of the professionals in the art world have changed less than the practices themselves, perhaps because the roles and functions largely still exist, but likely also because of political and organizational factors. Having established different organizations, rights, and rules for composers and sound technicians, the professions in themselves can be seen as just as much a labor as a political necessity. In large theatre institutions, there still are quite clearly defined roles and tasks. However, contemporary directors and companies within the institutions, for example, Societas Raffaello Sanzio/Romeo Castellucci and Anders Paulin, also challenge these preconceptions by omitting text, including sculpture, or making music (Christensen-Scheel, Lindgren, & Pettersen, 2013). Not everyone can operate a soundboard, but a trained performance artist can create and operate the sound for a performance with his or her computer. Not everyone can write a play, but a choreographer can create a poetic text, both verbally and non-verbally.

In visual art institutions, the roles have somewhat changed, there has, for example, been an accentuation of the role of the curator, but the curator can as much be an artist or a philosopher as an art historian. Although the term “curator” has come to mean an organizer or project leader, an artistic director, in some places, it is also an educator and conservator (O’Neill, 2010, 2012). Furthermore, “art education”, as mediation, communication, guiding, and text production, has different accentuations and executions in different institutions. In addition, as tasks can still be separated, perhaps not so with the educational background needed to execute them. This is not to say that art is lacking in professionalism, or that the specificity of an education is unnecessary, but perhaps, as Irit Rogoff led us, the qualities or abilities tied to these professions should be updated in accordance with our contemporary ambitions and formulated accordingly. As criticality and questioning remain important parts of contemporary art production, these aspects also constitute productional and

processual principles that can be seen as part of an 'art based knowledge'. However, when Janneke Wesseling, professor in art theory, discusses the particular qualities of artistic research or art based research, she notes the initial difference between the scientific and the artistic attitude, "The work of art is not the end product of the artist's thinking...it is an intermediate stage, a temporary halting of a never-ending thought process." Whether the thought process in relation to a work of art is really never-ending, is not to be addressed here, but Wesseling's point about an art work *creating* questions, rather than answering them, is a continuous problematic issue, as it is combined with science and applied perspectives. Wesseling sets up this dilemma or differing goals as a real problem: How can something that is directed toward creating *uncertainty* create *knowledge*? She notes that even as similar research practices, the aims of achieving knowledge (in science) and reflection through uncertainty (in art) are perhaps not compatible (Wesseling, 201, p.12). Sometimes it is and perhaps should not be compatible; other times, art is a natural and necessary part of research environments; for example, in relation to visual training, color competence, or media knowledge. Therefore, it cannot be a question of whether there *is* an art based knowledge. The question is whether our aims in research are compatible, if it is possible to keep an autonomous art based attitude when engaging with other systems, other logics, and other dynamics.

It is the belief here, in an applied discourse for contemporary art, that such an engagement is possible. Projects such as *Inside out. New images and imaginations of the body* (2010–2014), led by Professor Merete Lie at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, shows this use of artistic and cultural competence in the reading of medical imagery (<http://insideoutimaging.wordpress.com/about/>). Specifically, images collected by medical instruments require a competence of interpretation, and then can also be open for different interpretations, which actualize the visual competence. Alternatively, the medical diagnostic imagery in itself can become symbols or visual representations, used by the medical researchers to promote projects or institutes, thereby also linking the diagnostic image to power and economy. Nonetheless, in this context, the art based knowledge is also considered to be something particular. Whether art is necessarily a part of the regular societal production or whether art can never be considered as regular societal production, we can, I think, localize certain qualities based on discussions in the twentieth century art discourse. These qualities can be seen in relation to general production principles, and relate to what both the artist, Walter De Maria, and the theoretician, Irit Rogoff, touch upon: If we say that the outcome of art is uncertain, creating questions rather than answers, how can we relate to its qualities? How can we explain to the non-art world the benefits and potentials of non-structure and uncertainty? Because it is still necessary to describe and formulate these qualities and dynamics, to counter the evasiveness of the "emotionally indescribable" and the narrowness of goal oriented systematizations, scholars such as Rogoff, in the field of art didactics, emphasize the importance of a qualified and specific language in art education (Rogoff, 2006, p.14).

Here, I will point out four qualities that could be seen as vital to production in contemporary art, and that can further constitute art based productional principles, principles or aspects that could be included in project organization. Therefore, instead of polarizing into either critical distance or social immersion, autonomy in art today can first be about *independence from preplanned structures*. Specifically, the structure might be there, there also might be an institutional context and a curator acting as a sort of leader: However, there is, at least in theory, always an option either to divert from or to counter the structure that one is in. This means the possibility to act purposefully and respond suitably to a given situation, instead of having to follow a particular structure or way of acting. This could be called a *situational maneuvering*, or as physicist and slow philosopher, David Peat, has named a similar quality, a *creative suspense*. Peat uses the example of emergency teams, who are trained to always evaluate before they act, so they do not do more harm than has already been done. By this, he means an attitude of anticipation and reflection when encountering a problem or an emergency – a sensitivity to the “dynamics of the surrounding environment” in order to meet the situation in a reflected way (Peat, 2008, p.141).

The second quality is *non-profit*, or not having to “pay off”. This might seem trivial, but it really leaves room to consider the precise elements that ought to be considered and to choose something unobvious, innovative, or ethical. This is not the same as saying that art does not pay off, instead, it is saying something about not necessarily having “paying-off” as a production principle. Since this might leave room for other qualitative decisions, the chances are that it will eventually constitute a resource. It is not meant here that money is dangerous or dirty, rather that money, as a guiding principle, as rigid institutionalization or systematization, could leave out qualitative and specified reflection and adaptation. Third, *the production of something unknown* (or not-yet-known) relates to this innovative quality and non-structured quality – apart from art, most production processes have a specific thesis or intention of what to produce and how. If one arranged for a productive situation instead or did not seek to decide the outcome, it primarily resembles a research process. One could thus say that experimental art includes a research perspective in its production process. Finally, *a generative quality* in contemporary art must be emphasized. This is the quality of producing something that in its turn produces something else. This partially follows from producing something unknown, but has a further function – it means to set up situations that create other situations. In a non-art event context, for example, in the planning of a conference or the opening of an office building, it would normally be a point to control the event, that is, to assure that nothing unexpected happens or that one is prepared for the unexpected. Of course, it is vital to any context to assure that a stage is fixed, that people are safe, and that they are paid for their work. However, to be able and allowed to make choices that create something in themselves, can also be a resource in non-art contexts.

An example of some of these ‘art specific qualities’ can be found in the mixing of different Thai and Norwegian cultures at an event that was part of the art project *Sørfinnset school / the nord land* (Christensen-Scheel, 2009). The event was a party to celebrate the finishing of the main structure of a Thai house near Kjellingvann in the north of Norway. The strategy of the artists leading the project, Geir Tore Holm and Søsja Jørgensen, was to address a local public to create local engagement in the project. Therefore, when they announced the celebration, they did so only in the local newspapers, not in the typical art press. On the day of the party, there were different Norwegian art professionals from different parts of the country, as well as a group of Thai artists who had drawn and helped to build the structure of the house. Suddenly, several Thai women who lived in the area arrived with their North-Norwegian husbands. Having read that there was a Thai event in the area, they came for the event, without having any other connections or particular interest in art. The result was that these Thai women, living next to each other without knowing each other, became acquainted within the art project, establishing connections that could have social value and importance, but that had not been envisioned by the artists. The meeting brought together Thai and Norwegian art cultures, which was planned, but the event also arranged for the meeting of cultures perhaps more alien to each other, art and non-art cultures. The meeting also brought up discussions within the art project about Thai-Norwegian marriages – in some debates accused of being arranged or exploitative. However, these men and women meeting face-to-face nuanced ideological discussions, creating actual experiences and other possibilities, also to continue outside the art frame.

To sum up – this event could thus be said to have generated new events, and it did so in my opinion because it could allow itself to defer from general planning strategies and maneuver on the basis of more art specific criteria, such as not having to follow pre-planned structures, possible non-profit, production of something unknown, and generative situations. The project, for example, in not having to reach a specific target group, used this possibility to target outside its art audience. This had unknown consequences, but when these consequences appeared, they were welcomed and evaluated, rather than suppressed. In addition, without specifically fixing the frame as “art”, their project frame allowed for an art and culture exchange with Thailand. Such strategies are not apt in all fields and for all occasions, and as mentioned, health and ethics must be considered. However, as it will be claimed in this context, art based strategies can undoubtedly be of value and importance in further societal fields of production and social reflection. Some of these are mentioned in this issue’s articles, for example, urban development, intercultural education, historical research, communication, children and youth culture, innovation, mental health care, system organization, and sustainable development.

This Issue: The Reach and Span of Contemporary Art Didactics

The current thematic issue of *InFormation* is based on the goal of establishing different relationships between aesthetics and society – be it in applied art and theatre projects, in participatory design

strategies, or in the development of didactic and relational aesthetic theory. One goal is to widen the term didactic to be about qualitative *learning perspectives*, rather than specific and pre-conceptualized *learning methods* (Aure, 2006, 2011), to emphasize an art based knowledge and show that it carries specific qualities, is another (Adorno, 1970/2004; Rogoff, 2006; Wesseling, 2011). Although combined with a belief in the concrete and alternative power of aesthetic strategies and sensuous knowledge, the non-autonomous character of art is a starting point. Demonstrating the mutual dependence of theory and practice, the compilation unites artists, art educators, and theorists. It has a cross-disciplinary character with contributions from aesthetic subjects such as theatre, performance, visual arts, product and service design, visual culture, art didactics, and urban planning. Some are more directly applying aesthetic strategies or projects to contemporary tasks; others are discussing the potential in using artistic strategies or aesthetic approaches. Several of the articles unite researchers with different backgrounds, and constitute in themselves actual cross-disciplinary negotiations and practical-theoretical collaborations, which must be considered part of the overall project.

The first article, by PhD candidate Charlotte Blanche Myrvold, is a theoretical research into the precise conditions for evaluating the artistic skill in an urban redevelopment process. In “Negotiating the Image of the City. A Discussion of Skilled Visions and the Role of Artists in the Redevelopment of Bjørvika”, Myrvold uses the concepts of “skilled vision” and “seeing collective” to indicate the learned and social qualities of the sensuous images that are created. Based on the theoretical perspectives of French philosopher, Jacques Rancière, and science theorist, Lorraine Daston, Myrvold establishes a relation between what we are able to see and what we are able to envision in urban planning and development. Rancière points out the epistemological and even ontological potential in aesthetic reflection – as to this, Myrvold sees the artist as having a particular skill that could be put to use.

To link theoretical and practical perspectives is a particular goal both in this issue and for the journal *InFormation* in general. There is now an emerging field of artists who use a research based approach not just to produce art projects, but also to create different forms of reflections and self-reflections. Their position as reflective practitioners gives them a possibility to research from inside an art practice, emphasizing that research, like art, is also a practice. In addition, it shows that research can be carried out in a creative project, and that research can have a more explicit social or ideological goal. Professor in Visual Arts, Kristin Bergaust, engaged in a historically driven feminist video project. In the article, “The making of FQ, or how to pick up pellets of information in the clouds of fantasy”, Bergaust lets us follow the process of inquiry around a Norwegian women’s right activist, Frederikke Marie Qvam. Bergaust uses the story of a single woman, as well as of Norwegian political history, to write a new digital story, to actualize and mediate historical material to a contemporary public. For the artist to use research as part of a process, as well as to reflect upon a particular process,

creates a new text in addition to the “text” produced through the art project itself. In Rogoff’s sense, this could also be seen as part of a critical attitude, making the process less result oriented and more nuanced. The artistic process can also be used to portray a project engagement and attitude, showing how the material itself constitutes a sort of reflection. Following these artistic perspectives, the ideas of “material thinking” is tied to processes of innovation by two MA-students (now graduated): Anneli Hoel Fjærli, MA Student in Product Design, and Ida Haugland, MA Student in Visual and Performing Arts – both at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. Titled “Applied Art: Innovative Thinking from a Material Perspective”, the two students reach toward the core of an applied thinking in the arts. With craft and design competence, they discuss Olafur Eliasson and Anri Sala’s *The Collectivity Project*, which is simultaneously based on material interaction, subject driven innovation, and collective reflection.

Moving to the theatre and performance contributions in this issue, the applied tradition could perhaps be said to have a longer, or at least more developed, history than in the visual arts. Theatre and drama didactics is, for example, used to solve or exemplify social conflicts/dynamics or to activate different patient groups in social care (Gjærum, 2012; Nicholson, 2005). In “Emancipatory Theater and Performative Didactics – An Action Based Research Project”, Associate Professor in Art Didactics, Venke Aure, and Assistant Professor in Drama and Theatre Communication, Karin B. Bjerkestrand – both at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences – and Anna Songe-Møller, Associate Professor in Drama and Theatre at the University of Stavanger, discuss the potential of a *performative didactic* approach through the use of a specific project and methods inspired by theatre reformer, Augusto Boal. The project focuses on an immigrant perspective and has a set goal to empower actors through “Solidarity Forum Theatre”, creating actual consequences for actual people. Here, the material of an inter-cultural theatre process organized by Bjerkestrand and Songe-Møller, is set into a scientific framework and further theorized by Aure. The belief in theatre and its equality-creating face-to-face potential resides within the concept of “Emancipatory Theatre”. In the next article, “Look at me! A discussion of quality in performing art based on a performative approach”, Lisa Nagel, PhD candidate at The Norwegian Institute of Children’s Books, uses a performance theoretical apparatus, based on Erika Fischer-Lichte and Siemke Böhnisch, to point out the *dissonans* or non-communication that also goes on in the theatre. The field, more specifically, is theatre for children and youth, and Nagel points out how participation in art, for example in the performance theoretical *feedback loop*, is a matter of both nuancing and discussion.

The field of art and health is now becoming prominent, and following the contemporary art didactic ambitions, it seeks, in this context, to create health benefits and opportunities by using a specific high quality art competence. Rikke Gürgens Gjærum, Professor in Applied Theatre, holding positions at Oslo and Akershus University College and at Harstad University College, has written two

articles addressing different sides of applied theatre and a specific *reminiscence theatre* project. Having set out to explore and thematize old age as a resource rather than a burden, Gjørnum ran an age-exchange project including elderly and youth, meeting to create a performance over the lived lives of the elderly. In the two articles “Recalling Memories Through Reminiscence Theatre” and “Art, Age & Health: A research journey about developing reminiscence theatre in an age-exchange project”, Gjørnum shows how the research process is as important as the final product, and further how art based research can create “a social product” in itself. In the last article, also in the field of art and health, the aesthetic awareness and competence in a mental health care environment is discussed by PhD candidate and Assistant Professor in Product Design, Arild Berg; Associate Professor in Health Care and psychiatric nurse, Mette Holme Ingeberg; and myself, Associate Professor in Aesthetics and Art Didactics, Boel Christensen-Scheel – all at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. In the article, “Forming Life: Aesthetic Awareness in Mental Health Care”, the three authors emphasize the fundamental connection between aesthetic influences and mental states, and stress the importance of a more developed awareness in mental health care. This article places itself in a line of practical-theoretical art research, which seek to formulate a non-emotionally based language in aesthetics, seeing the value of formulating skills and qualities, however based on art specific qualities and knowledge which might well be uncertainty and uselessness.

Finally, we are publishing a video by artist Ellen Johanne Røed, made as part of an artistic PhD program at Bergen University College and previously shown at an exhibition in Oslo at Kunstnernes Hus (Høstutstillingen, 2013). The video places itself in the midst of the discussions around art and science, art based research, and material reflection. As our tentative conclusion we present Røed’s video piece *Skyvelære*. The video creates a reflexive and sensuous room for the reader, and can be seen to install the “creative suspense” that much research is perhaps lacking. The video can also be seen to constitute an argument in favor of art based knowledge, as it observes and contextualizes the creation of precise knowledge.

Based on a contemporary oriented art didactic, we seek to address, respond to, and sometimes dispute, societal matters by applying autonomous aesthetics. These qualities are part of creating something that completes, comments, criticizes, and possibly corrects the patterns and structures that we build around us. As sociologist, Niklas Luhmann, pointed out, self-critique or self-improvement is a natural part of advanced or mature systems (1995, p.471). Therefore, one could argue, it is also in the interest of the societal machinery that we leave something outside of it, if we can call it outside at all, since it stands in a functional relation to this machinery. Nonetheless, to see art as an important and potential *societal function*, is in the interest of both art and society. In this issue, we debate why and how such a function can be exercised, and we give you examples of art projects, skills, and attitudes that evolve around aesthetics and applied qualities, emphasizing their didactic and collective basis.

On the contributor

Boel Christensen-Scheel is associate professor in aesthetics and art didactics at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. Christensen-Scheel holds a Ph.D. in contemporary art and performance theory, and her field of interest mainly concerns art's relational capacities from bodily experience, epistemology and didactics, to more explicit political and ecological projects. She has translated Nicolas Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics' to Norwegian (Pax Forlag, Artes, 2007), worked as an art critic and more recently she has published an essay about Kjartan Slettemark's Nixon Series (Torpedo Press, 2010).

References

- Adorno, T. (1972/2001). *The culture industry*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Adorno, T. (1970/2004). *Aesthetic theory*. London: Continuum.
- Artaud, A. (1999). *The theatre and its double*. Montreuil/London/New York, Calder.
- Artaud, A. (1936/1989). *Art and theatre*. (Ed.) Claude Schumacher, London, Methuen Drama.
- Aure, V. (2006). "Formidling av bilder til barn – som kunstdidaktisk diskurs". Tidsskrift for børne- og ungdomskultur Nr 51 / Kunstformidling for og med børn og unge. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag & Børne- og Ungdomskultursammenslutningen.
- Aure, V. (2011). *Kampen om blikket*. Academic Dissertation for the degree PhD Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Bale, K. & Bø-Rygg, A. (red.). (2008). *Estetisk teori – En antologi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Bial, H. (Ed.). (2004). *The performance studies reader*. London: Routledge.
- Borgdorff, H. (2011). The production of knowledge in artistic research. In M. Biggs, & H. Karlsson, H. (Ed.). *The Routledge companion to research in the arts*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bourriaud, N. (1999/2003). *Formes de vie*. Paris: Éditions Denoël.
- Bourriaud, N. (2001). *Esthétique Relationnelle*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.
- Bourriaud, N. (2003). *Postproduction*. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.
- Brecht, B. (1927/2000). *Le Théâtre épique*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Bürger, P. (1984). *Theory of the avant-garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Christensen-Scheel, B. (2009). *Mobile Homes – Perspectives on Situatedness and De-Situatedness in Performative Practice and Theory*. PhD dissertation, Oslo: Unipub/University of Oslo.
- Christensen-Scheel, B. (2013). "Den anerkjente betrakter", *Artic Challenge*, in press.
- Christensen-Scheel, B., Lindgren, C., & Pettersen, A. (2013). Scenography in the staging / On the stage / In the mind of the audience. *Journal of Performance Research*, 18(3). London: Routledge.

- De Maria, W. (1960). Meaningless work. In K. Stiles & P. Selz (Eds.) (1996). *Theories and documents of contemporary art – A sourcebook of artists' writings*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2004). *A thousand plateaus*. London: Continuum.
- Féral, J. (1997). The subject demystified. In T. Murray (Ed.): *Mimesis, masochism and mime: Performance and theatricality*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Gjærum, R. G., & Rasmussen, B. (2012). *Forestilling, framføring, forskning: Metodologi i anvendt teaterforskning*. Trondheim: Akademika Forlag.
- Nicholson, H. (2005). *Applied drama: The gift of theatre*. London: Palgrave.
- O'Neill, P., & Wilson, M. (Ed.). (2010). *Curating and the educational turn*. Amsterdam: Open Editions.
- O'Neill, P. (2012). *The culture of curating and the curating of culture(s)*. London: The MIT Press.
- Rancière, J. (2009). *The emancipated spectator*. London: Verso.
- Rogoff, I. (2006). Academy as potentiality. I: A.C.A.D.E.M.Y. Nollert, S. Et al., (Ed.). Frankfurt am Main: Revolver.
- Schechner, R. (1987). Victor Turner's last adventure. In *Victor Turner: The anthropology of performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Schechner, R. (1988/2003). *Performance theory*. London: Routledge.
- Schechner, R. (2004). Performance studies: The broad spectrum approach, In (Ed.) H. Bial, *The performance studies reader*. London: Routledge.
- Turner, V. (1987). *The anthropology of performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Wesseling, J. (2011). *See it again, Say it again: The artist as researcher. Introduction*. Amsterdam: Valiz.