

Marita Flisbäck and Anna Lund

Editorial – Artists and Professionalism

Artists and professionalism is a special issue that aims to bring artistic work into the field of professions and professionalism. The issue consists of five contributions that highlight artistic professions from different perspectives, such as artists' educational possibilities, professional careers, strategies for inclusion and exclusion, boundary-making, emotional labor, and how professional autonomy is affected by welfare state policies.

The articles presented in this issue of *Professions and Professionalism* were written by researchers affiliated with the Swedish cross-disciplinary research network: *The Network for Promotion of Working Lives Research in the Arts and Culture Sector* (funded by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare, reference number 2008-1459). The network started in 2008 and brings together researchers interested in artists' professional careers as well as artistic educational trajectories. The affiliates are from different disciplines, such as sociology, history of literature, ethnology, and psychology; they use methods ranging from ethnography and qualitative in-depth interviews to statistics and experiments. The network has also included professional artists and cultural managers, which has contributed to lively discussions on the state of art for artists from an everyday lived experience perspective as well as a more analytical and scholarly perspective. With this special issue we hope not only to inspire researchers in the fields of professions and working life studies, but also to provide perspectives for professionals in different artistic fields.

This special issue can be regarded as a result of the Network's endeavors to develop international discussions on artists' working life conditions to allow comparison of working conditions in relation to welfare state regimes and cultural ideals. The issue is one contribution to this international discussion on working life and professionalism in the arts and cultural sector. By conceptualizing analyses of different artistic fields in different national settings using professions theories and occupational studies, it is possible to reveal both specific and general patterns of artistic working life. We believe, furthermore, that analysis of working conditions and professional careers for artists can give rise to analytical insights into other occupational fields. One such example may be that artists could be viewed as a precursor for a "new," more precarious working life in late-modern capitalistic society, which is dominated by temporary employment, freelance and distance work. In the Network, some of the common themes presented by the researchers have been aimed at understanding the position of the artist vis-à-vis contemporary trends in a "new" working life and the possibilities of professional careers under uncertain conditions. This has long been part of artists' everyday life, as has the need to combine artistic work with other work in order to make ends meet.

The relation between educational trajectories and working life for artists is

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another theme of great relevance to research on artistic careers. Tacit, but dominant, ideals from the artistic field are frequently embedded and taken for granted in the educational setting, often creating difficulties for students who lack cultural capital. Instructors and invited guest lecturers may, for example, function as gatekeepers for prestigious opportunities in working life. Hence, the relation between academic institutions and working life is a strong force in forming artists' professional paths, as well as their inner life, well-being, and conditions for professionalism. Applying critical theory when analyzing the issue of the importance of education to a continued artistic career is a theme that will be reflected on in this special issue. However, it should be underlined that the articles here focus on professional artists by looking at different empirical settings from slightly different theoretical perspectives. They offer discussions located at the intersection of national context, specific artistic cultural contexts, cultural sociology, sociology of emotions, and professional theories. All in all, the articles cover a range of topics, from the educational paths that structure professionalism, the emotional labor of stage actors and the professional logics of artistic working life, to the significance of welfare state cultural policies' influence for artistic autonomy and recognition of artistic work in society.

This special issue aims to explore a number of questions through the individual articles. Some of the questions are: In what way could research on artistic work and artists contribute to research on professional groups in general? How important are educational settings as a condition for professionalism? How can we understand the habituation of embodied professional work by looking at the relation between the private and the professional emotional domain? What are the similarities and differences between artists and other professional groups? And finally, how can cultural policy affect the conditions for professionalism? The authors utilize material derived from various settings. Readers will meet the art world from the perspective of visual artists, writers, editors, professional stage actors, sometimes as practitioners of their profession, and sometimes as students or instructors in academic settings.

The issue starts with an introduction written by Lennart Svensson. His is a reflective text that relates the rest of the articles in the issue to the oeuvre of theories of professions and professionalism, as well as to sociological theories of the arts and culture. The author also demonstrates how research on artists could develop studies of professions in general, for example in regard to processes of symbolic closure and emotional labor.

The second article, written by Sofia Lindström, takes us on a journey through a highly prestigious educational setting for visual artists in Sweden. Utilizing discourse analysis, Lindström reveals the taken-for-granted rules of artistic education that are not made explicit in the academic setting. How this influences professional identities with regard to whether they are troubled or untroubled by this hidden curriculum is highlighted. For example, the teachers' ideal of not restricting their students could in fact function—in practice—as a restriction.

In the third article, Clayton Childress and Alison Gerber analyze the use, and uselessness, of credentials from Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing programs in the United States. At the same time as MFAs have increased in number, the different actors involved—such as writers, instructors, and editors—are not convinced of the utility of the programs, because the consensus is that you cannot "teach" anyone to be a good writer. The article investigates this puzzle and the symbolic usage of MFAs.

In the fourth article, Stina Bergman Blix investigates the apparently paradoxical endeavor of many professions, which is to communicate emotions that are convincing and truthful, but not private. By analyzing, on the basis of ethnography and qualitative interviews, a group of stage actors, Bergman Blix shows how this relation between private and professional emotions is used in the rehearsal process

and on stage. Bergman Blix points out how emotions can be used as professional tools through a process of decoupling the emotional expressions from their original private experiences. The emotions are habituated, and settle in the body and can thus be repeated with less effort, while creating art that (can) give rise to emotional experiences in the prospective audience.

The final article, written by Marita Flisbäck and Anna Lund, analyzes the political backdrop for artistic work and the possibilities that are created, but also constrained, for professional autonomy by state-defined cultural policy. A specific policy reform for allocating public funds, the so-called Cultural Collaboration Model, serves as an example to consider in relation to artists' conditions for professionalism in a Swedish context. It also serves as an example of the broader question of tensions between political control and professional autonomy in relation to the work of "welfare professionals."

The editors of this issue hope that the articles will lead to further investigations of artists and their professional world as well as generate new research focused on making comparisons between artists and other professional groups.

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Guest Editors