

Article 5 BEYOND THE DANCE OF LIFE

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Abstract

This article explores the meaning potential of the concept of transformation in arts education. The examples are taken from a working process with student drama teachers from two universities in Finland, producing a performance inspired by the painter Edvard Munch's (1863–1944) paintings and diary fragments. The specific painting used was *Dance of Life*. Examples from the working process of two different groups are intended to illuminate a discussion about learning processes informed by the notion of transformation as a key concept in arts education. This is done explicitly in order to enhance reflections on pedagogical and aesthetic choices in a teacher- thinking perspective. The two groups represent different aesthetic responses to the challenges of the course task. The theme of the course in question was an exploration of the relationship between life and art.

Résumé

Cet article explore le potentiel de sens du concept de la transformation dans l'enseignement des lettres. Les exemples sont pris d'un processus de travail avec les élèves-professeurs de théâtre de deux universités en Finlande qui produisent un spectacle inspiré par les peintures et les extraits de journal du peintre Edvard Munch (1863–1944). La peinture précise qu'ils ont utilisée s'intitule la *Danse de la Vie*. Des exemples du processus de travail des deux groupes différents ont pour but d'éclairer une discussion sur les processus d'apprentissage, informés par la notion de transformation en tant que concept clé dans l'enseignement des lettres. Cela est fait de manière explicite pour améliorer les réflexions sur les choix pédagogiques et esthétiques du point de vue de la pensée de l'enseignant. Les deux groupes représentent des réponses esthétiques différentes face aux défis de la tâche requise par le cours. Le thème du cours en question était une exploration de la relation entre la vie et l'art.

Resumen

Este artículo investiga el potencial en el significado del concepto de transformación en la educación del arte. Los ejemplos se toman de un proceso de trabajo con profesores de drama en formación de dos universidades en Finlandia poniendo en escena una actuación inspirada por los cuadros y fragmentos del diario del pintor Edvard Munch (1863–1944), siendo '*Dance of Life*' (*El baile de la vida*) el cuadro específico utilizado al respecto. Los ejemplos del proceso de trabajo de dos grupos diferentes están destinados a aclarar un debate acerca de procesos de aprendizaje al corriente de la idea de transformación como un concepto clave en la educación del arte. Esto se hace explícitamente para mejorar las reflexiones acerca de opciones pedagógicas y estéticas desde una perspectiva relativa al pensamiento del profesor. Los dos grupos representan respuestas estéticas diferentes a los desafíos de la tarea del curso. El tema del curso en cuestión fue una exploración de la relación entre vida y arte.

Author's biography

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BEYOND THE DANCE OF LIFE

Introduction

The learning process in arts education does not progress mainly in a linear way, but is better described as cyclical. The teacher supports the learner's competence through a structure of teaching where the student can elaborate substantive knowledge starting from less complex mental models. During the cyclical process, more complex mental models can be elicited from repeated exploration, trials and refinement of the expression. Production and interpretation of vertical layer-upon-layer signs is very characteristic of artistic processes. This process is a meaning-making process whereby the learner elaborates mimesis as imitation, as representation and as play, with mimesis in a continuous meaning-making process. Different meanings are produced, often simultaneously, through the use and interpretation of semiotic signs. These signs are often non-verbal, hence the meaning is created in a symbolic way. It might be that each sign separately does not have a specific meaning, but the combination — the juxtaposition — of different signs produces significances, both personal and more universal.

Exploring artistic learning processes

Research involving artistic processes is demanding. In this context, 'artistic' refers to work in an art form (theatre) with reference to the demands of the art form. The processes are dynamic and constantly changing. They are improvised and thus to a certain degree unpredictable; they are also complex and have different intentions. Many different participants contribute to and maximise the interpretative possibilities. They form different narratives. In the process, different vertical layers of meaning can be revealed simultaneously: focusing on different layers may form different horizons of understanding.

The participants in the drama process obtain the necessary aesthetic distance by 'framing' as part of the contract with the participants. The participants are framed, for instance, as visitors to an exhibition with Edvard Munch's paintings through the drama convention 'teacher-in-role' (with the teacher portraying Munch's last model), or as art students who get the possibility to paint Munch's last model as an old lady. To be placed in a context, put in a frame, positioned gives the participants safety and protection. The protection concerns the person's privacy, which is not exploited, because the role character is created as a construction. Through the positioning, it is also possible to be placed outside the fiction with the task of supporting the construction of the fiction. The safety consists of the distance that is created in the construction, the role the participant helps to construct. The protection lies in the fact that the role is a construction: it is fictive, it does not have an independent life, it only exists for a limited time. Through the role, the participants can explore and elaborate important life themes, understand the perspective of the other and study the life world from a certain perspective.

During the process with Munch's paintings and diary fragments as pretext, the participants were framed in nine positions during the process, as: (1) participants; (2) guides; (3) agents; (4) authorities reconstructing events; (5) reporters; (6) the press; (7) explorers; (8) critics (through the convention 'hot seat' of characters in role); and finally as (9) artists transforming the results of the working process to a presentation performed a few times for a friendly audience.

Aesthetic distance

An aesthetic distance is created when an aesthetic or everyday emotional experience is elaborated in a poetic way. The poetic elaboration is temporary; different solutions are suggested, different ways of using symbols and metaphors are probed. One solution is tried out — it is like writing in sand, in that it can be wiped out and substituted by another solution. Both the teacher and the students can function as side coaches in improvisations. Side coach is a concept used by Spolin (1974), denoting when the leader of an improvisation, during the ongoing improvisation, provides prompts like 'show that you are aware of her'; 'slow down your tempo'; 'make the vowels long'; all of these are examples of 'feed-in' through side coaching. Through this 'feed-in', the acting is vitalised and the work made more dynamic, but it is explicitly done with aesthetic distance: the real person is not questioned or criticised; it is the role

character with whom the elaboration is done. The real person is protected as long as the work is done with the role character. The role is an aesthetic construction and engagement in the role: sympathy or antipathy is elaborated regarding the role-construction. The participants in role can thus question, become moved, seduced or enchanted, or show disgust. The border with fiction is sustained through the aesthetic distance. The aesthetic elaboration is a meaning-producing process and it is a transforming process, where expression is transformed — often from one modality (form) to another. A verbally expressed feeling might, for instance, be transformed into a bodily expression through dance.

Transformative aesthetic theory

Transformation is a concept borrowed from Dewey's description of transformative aesthetics in *Art as Experience* (1980 [1934]). Løvlie (1990) describes three aesthetic theories: the mimetic, the expressive and the transformative. According to mimetic theory, the art product that resembles the original is considered beautiful. According to expressive theory, the expression emerging from the inner person is considered beautiful. Transformative theory describes the aesthetic product as an ongoing interactive process where the interaction is between I and me, between I and the material, I and the task, I and the technique in use, I and the other participants, I and the supervisor. This dialogical elaboration is transformative — whether it is an emotional experience or an everyday experience, a sensuous impression is transformed through a poetic elaboration in an art form into an aesthetic experience. In the working process with the Munch project, the idea of a poetic elaboration is a guiding principle.

Tentative research questions connected to the notion of transformation

My explorative and tentative research questions are: How can Dewey's transformative aesthetics be applied to learning processes in an art form? Does aesthetic distance enable the students to engage themselves deeply in the theme and the material? How can the life worlds of the students be engaged and included in the learning process?

An artistic production is an idea studied through one or more temperaments. The form transformations might be distortion, enlargement, exaggeration, diminution, understatement, stylisation and simplification. To some extent, stylising is always a part, since the creating person or group has to choose some elements to build the fiction upon; this is because the time at their disposal is limited in a performance. Film techniques are excellent examples of form transformations: slow motion, rapid tempo, changes in use of lenses (close-up, tilt, a bird's eye view), panning, still images, grotesque use of lenses, unfocused pictures, sudden and staccato movements. Through form transformations, the action receives a comment; the fiction comments on itself. This is called a meta-fictive comment. The form transformations make a status change. Alterations in perspectives contribute to different meaning-making processes. Stylised moments are loaded with symbolic meaning potential.

Common to all transformations of form in theatre is the empty space in between what is created. This empty space allows for a de-automatisation. The space in between is a space for learning. This learning can be described as an otherness education, a character formation where the learner can observe the hitherto unknown aspects of him/herself, get to know otherness in other human beings in themes, and formal expression. This meeting is a meeting that makes a change in the learner's understanding. The learner is touched and moved and no longer exactly the same person as before this encounter. This learning is described by Finnish arts education researcher Sava (1995) as being the result of an artistic learning process.

The learning potential in aesthetic doubling

Iser (1978) describes the reader's encounter with a fictive text as a developing competence in making an aesthetic doubling. Iser's theory of aesthetic reception describes the meeting between the text of the author and the reader as an active creation from the reader, a reader's response to the author's text. In the author's text there are gaps and blanks, empty spaces, which the reader fills out with his or her interpretations. Fictive or aesthetic reading is characterised by a special competence: not only by decoding letter by letter, but by interpreting the sub-text, reading between and beyond the lines, catching up with threads planted earlier in the text and making new interpretations when new information about the characters is given. Sklóvskij (2001) has described 'ostranjenje' as a defamiliarisation, making the for-given-taken not so automatically perceived. 'Ostranjenje' contributes to a fresh view on events. These are called the skills of a competent reader of fiction. (Steffensen 2001).

In drama, this doubling to a large extent is embodied. There is an aesthetic doubling of space, time and character. Real-life events are transformed into a plot. The doubling consists of the decision by the group to transform a real place to a fictive space, to transform real time to fictive time, and the participants' decision to take roles and build role characters. The group and the teacher together form the dramatic narrative. In the flip-flopping between mythos (to be in the fiction, or in memories) and logos (to reflect upon and plan the construction of fiction), there is a space for learning, a space where emotional and cognitive elements become integrated in understanding and insight. Through simultaneous expositions, the audience can meet a role character as a child, as a grown-up and as an old person. It is possible to look at the life of the painter Munch with a perspective from the past, present and future simultaneously through, for instance, the convention 'Voices in the head' (the inner dialogue formed by voices from different periods in this character's life). In using layer-upon-layer-techniques, meaning-making and interpretation can be promoted.

Code competence and meta-language

Art is connected to knowing. Every art form has a need for craft: skills to perform the art in question. In every art form there is a challenge to master different techniques, conventions and material. Code competence within a cultural field also requires that the individual recognises and is able to use the codes and the coded symbolic language within the field in question. In my example, the knowing is connected to body, voice and cultural codes. The theatrical performance contains signs from all other art forms. Hence knowledge of the signs of theatre is a central competence, which the students must master in a productive way, and also be able to interpret in reception. How the expressive resources of the body are used in physical theatre and mime, and how the voice is used, open up or close down the meaning-making possibilities. Choice of language code, accent, style — all of these are examples of different communicative signals, which are part of an interpretative process, or which stay as undiscovered signals, not interpreted or interpreted in a very restricted way. In child and youth culture today, there is an ongoing meaning-producing process through the establishment of new hybrid genres containing elements from different genres, the creation of codes known only by the insiders of a certain group. With respect to art, code competence means a more developed, complex horizon of understanding, which gives the possibility of a more qualified interpretation. To this qualifying process belongs the acquisition of meta-language, the terms to be used when you talk about a phenomenon in the field (the art form in question), like the actualised theme. This meta-cognitive competence is a genre competence, which supports the learning processes.

Cultural perspective as point of departure

Teaching at a pedagogical level focuses on the pedagogical dimensions of teaching and learning. If this pedagogical competence is coordinated with aesthetic competence, respect is shown for the art form used in the working process. To teach from an aesthetic standpoint means that the rules and conventions of the art form guide the pedagogical and methodological thinking.

To teach from an aesthetic standpoint does not imply that the pedagogical considerations are ignored, but rather indicates that the teaching is guided by pedagogical as well as aesthetic considerations. An appropriate protocol for this form of learning could be to take a cultural perspective as the point of departure. A merely pedagogical perspective reduces the learning potential, but if an aesthetic perspective is also included, then the horizons can be widened. When the group is motivated and prepared for work in an art form, it is a self-evident starting point that the aesthetic perspective is invoked. An aesthetic perspective in support of other learning processes can make these processes richer, no matter what the knowledge area is. The aim of the project *Dance of Life* was — from the perspective of drama teacher education, as a learning challenge — to stage an artistic learning process. The intended learning aim for the students was to explore the relationship between lived life and creative, productive art-making.

Transformations inspired by *Dance of Life*

The double aim of the course was decided upon when discussing the working contract with the students. In the process, the central aim was to learn about how to use voice, drama, dance and performative elements as meaning-making through the use of symbols and metaphors. Furthermore, it was decided that the process should lead to a performance to present to an audience. The presentation could be a

collage of scenes or a performance. In performance, the participants work with different kinds of montage techniques. Performance is in the borderland between role and not role; place is substituted with space; the time can be without specific time; the plot can be substituted by a mood. The other aim for the production was to explore the relationship between life and art using Edvard Munch as the example. The sources of biographical information and artistic information were Bjørnstad (1993) and Stang (1977). All the diary quotes are from Stang's book about Edvard Munch. In both groups, the specific aims for the performances were defined. In performance, the notion of inter-textuality is of specific interest, because the interpretation of a performance to a large extent builds upon inter-textual resonances. An inter-textual resonance implies that an earlier produced thought, text, image, music or movement can be identified as an element in the new expression. The building bricks are recirculated. The painting *Dance of Life* was used as a starting point (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The painting *Dance of Life* [Livets Dans] by Edvard Munch

In the following sections, I highlight some aspects of the work-in-progress, focusing on transformations. I also point out some performative aspects, where a narrative is woven through a compilation of non-verbal symbols in a metaphorical expression, the language of art. One alternative to the performative theatre metaphor is the text-bound theatre metaphor. In the performances are included texts produced by the students. I have translated the texts from Swedish and Finnish. In the texts I quote in the article, I mark the quotations from Munch's diary.

In order to motivate the students, they were exposed to paintings and diary fragments by Edvard Munch. The groups were working with exploratory phase conventions from the process drama methodology. The participants, for instance, wrote fictional pages in role as Edvard Munch and they created dance expression to music typical of Edvard Munch's time as well as to contemporary music. One text central to the elaboration was the text called Munch's 'manifesto':

One would no longer paint interiors, people that read and women that knit. It would be living people that breathe and feel, suffer and love. (c. 1892)

The idea that Group 1 wanted to realise as a stage text was formulated in the following way by the

students (after one week's work with the production):

Art is a way to express life. We want to give an emotional experience, we want to touch. We focus on Munch's total commitments/passion: anxiety, alcohol, gambling, women, death, skinlessness, love; above all love of life expressed through his paintings. The group's description of its purpose has a clear inter-textual resonance in the manifesto. The group members quoted the manifesto text on the program leaflet they produced. Group 2 included the text in the last interlude in the performance.

Structure of the performances

The material I analyse in this article consists of manuscripts from the groups, photographs and a video version (filmed live) of the performance by Group 2. In addition, I use information from the teacher's field notes.

Group 1

Group 1 worked with three different teachers, one of whom was their head-teacher. The group worked for approximately 40 hours with the teachers. The performance took place in a gymnastics hall with the audience placed in the middle of the hall and the stages were all four walls. The friendly audience consisted of other students and teachers at the university. The title of the performance was *Passion – Dance of Life* [Passion – Livets dans]. The genre was performance/collage and the duration of the performance was 45 minutes.

1. Dance of Life
2. Memory from Childhood
3. Erotica
4. The Laughter of Ducha
5. Madonna, Vampire, Whore
6. Fame is Growing
7. Woman in Three Movements
8. Coda: Dance of Life (repeated)

Group 2

Group 2 worked with one teacher for about 25 hours. The performance took place in the living room of a public community artists' house. The audience consisted of drama teachers gathered for a network meeting and of other students at the university. The title of the performance was *Half Dream, Half Reality* [Puoleksi unessa, puoleksi todellisuudessa] The genre was performance/collage and the duration of the performance was 20 minutes.

1. The Scream
2. Mother
3. Auntie Karen
4. Women
5. Men
6. Dance of Life
7. Solitude

Transformation of key event

In both groups, the students were actively involved in producing their interpretations of the women respectively in white, red and black. The interpretations were constructed collectively. In both groups, one incident is interpreted as a decisive event: Edvard Munch lost his mother from tuberculosis when he was five years old. This is viewed as a key event in which later decisive moments are mirrored. The participants interpret much of what happened in Munch's later life as resonating from the agony and loss in his childhood.

Based on roughly the same background of fact and experience, the two groups produced totally different

transformations of this key event. I describe the two realisations of this key event in Performance 1 and Performance 2. Even if the scenes build upon different principles (text and performance), the point of view is the child's — that of Edvard at age five.

In Group 1, a figure — a puppet about 70 centimetres tall — represents Edvard as a five-year-old (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. A puppet and a puppeteer acting a scene with five-year-old Edvard and his sick mother

Group 1, Scene 2: Memory of a Childhood

The following is an extract from the monologue (intended as a dialogue with the sick mother; the audience can hear only Edvard's voice):

(The puppeteer sitting on a chair rocking the puppet in her [my] arms)

Edvard: What do you mean? (The puppet sits in my lap) Travel away? I want you to stay at home with me! Who then will prepare food for me when I am hungry? I do not want you to go away anywhere. (The puppet jumps up on the chair looking out of the window)

Edvard: Have you seen how it's snowing! Mummy, are you coming out with me? We can build a snowman, such as the one we built last year, with a big carrot as a nose and ... I'll go and get my clothes. What do you mean? What, I don't have the strength? Just a little while, please mummy! (The puppet is looking at me and I shake my head with a 'no'. I lift the puppet in my arms, I rock

him; we sit down on the chair and we are softly rocking.)

Edvard: Uhm... well, then we'll take that Tuberculosis out with us then. He can come too if he wants to. (The puppet is on my left knee.)

I don't permit you to die! (The puppet hits himself on his knee.) Mothers do not die! (The puppet hits himself on his knee.) M-o-o-ther, I don't want to... (the puppet caresses his knee) Don't you like me anymore? (The puppet looks at me and I nod while I give the puppet a hug.) I don't want us to meet in heaven!

I want you to stay here and help me make snowmen and to comfort me when I am sad. (The puppet is alone on the chair.) I don't want to be with Jesus! I want to be with you ...

In a scene later on, the 'woman in red' pretends to be mortally ill and sends for Edvard Munch. As an inter-textual resonance the audience can hear the repetition of little Edvard's I don't permit you to die.

Group 2, Scene 2: Mother

Group 2 chose to perform the farewell of the dead mother as a dreamlike, almost wordless ritual mood image.

The scene is illuminated by a bluish spotlight; heart beat. On a podium a woman in black is lying. She looks like she is sleeping. By the bed is little Edvard with his mother's arm around him. He is also sleeping with his head and his arms on the stomach of his mother. The other family members, the father and auntie Karen, are kneeling in comforting, mourning positions. A sound associated with the wind of death can be heard (produced by the participants: o-o-o-o-o ...). The sound of the heartbeat stops. So does the sound of the wind. Behind the bed stands the father with a light, and he says: Children say farewell to your mother. Edvard is awakening, but his father says: Edvard, just sleep! He does so while the others in different ways silently mark their farewell by a caress or a hug. The light on the scene fades out — and fades up as a transition to the next scene, where a young woman laughs and brings the light with her.

The inter-textual resonance of this scene is the heartbeat, which also was heard right at the beginning of the performance. The woman in black appears in subsequent scenes. The laughter is a planting of thoughts connected to Munch's relations with women. This laughter is again heard in a later scene.

Analysis

In the next section, I give an account of the analysis of the transformations made with a clear connection to the distinct painting of Munch. The aim of the analysis is to identify which patterns of transformation can be observed in the created scenes. The first matrix text in Table 1 comprises the scene I have described above: a key event, the death of the mother, when Edvard Munch was five years old.

Transformations starting from paintings by Munch

In the productions, both Group 1 and Group 2 chose a man to represent Munch. In Group 1, the 'Agony' scene included a 'woman in black' as a representation of one aspect of Munch's personality. In the matrix shown in Table 1, I have compiled the transformations the groups made, inspired by paintings, with visual traces in the dramatic expression. The order of the transformations does not represent the final structure of the performances. When I have placed the descriptions of the transformations alongside each other, I do not intend to compare them; rather, I wish to give examples of how the same impulse may be elaborated in different ways in an artistic process. The inner world and mental images of the individuals as well as the contributions from the other participants contribute to the artistic decisions the group makes.

Text fragments and sound collage

The performance of Group 2 starts with a sound cacophony gradually coalescing into a loud scream and the painting *The Scream* is projected on to the wall. A heartbeat is heard. The spotlight is on the man

representing Edvard Munch throughout the performance, and his first utterance — ‘I have lived half in a dream, half in reality’ — became an inter-textual resonance throughout the performance.

The performance produced by Group 2 contained small interludes in between the scenes. These interludes were sound and movement formations based on fragments from Munch’s diary. These interludes, with three students involved, were produced during a period of the working process when the students engaged themselves in the material, tried out interpretations and formed individual relationships to Munch’s paintings and texts.

Table 1: Transformations from paintings to other modalities as metaphors for aspects of life

<i>Painting by Munch</i>	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>
‘Dead Mother in Her Bed’	Munch, 5 years old (puppet and puppeteer).	Sound (the wind of death), blue light on the mother, woman in black, the child and the father, ritual farewell.
‘The Scream’	The painting is projected on a white moving piece of cloth, a person in black, with a white painted masque is miming a scream; during this process two other persons are winding the miming person in a white piece of cloth like a straitjacket.	The painting is projected on the wall. A scream is heard.
‘Karen’		Teacher-in-role as Auntie Karen tells about Edvard as a gifted child — simultaneously the child Edvard runs across the scene, joyfully showing his paintings to his aunt. The Balinese string quartet is heard for the first time.

<p>'Dance of Life'</p>	<p>A choreographed dance with five dancers. The sound of a heartbeat.</p> <p>The final scene: woman in red, in black and in white are mentioned in a monologue by the painter Munch and the women vanish through the frames, now forming an alley. The dance is repeated as a coda to the performance.</p> <p>Woman in red is also elaborated in the scenes 'Erotica', 'Ducha's laughter' and 'Madonna, vampire, whore'.</p>	<p>Scene with woman in red (Ducha) who undresses mimically: 'Look here is my gift to art', Duchu's husband Prybyzewski says.</p> <p>In the scene 'Women' the image of woman in red is elaborated.</p>
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'Separation'	Woman in black represents the sorrow always accompanying Munch. In one scene, the woman in black has a light with her, the importance she has for Munch's artistry.	Woman in black (at a restaurant): 'I am always with you; without me your art is nothing.' Woman in black is also Munch's beloved, whom he will not bring with him to Europe. Music with the Balinese Quartet is heard again.
'Death of Marat', 'Amor and Psyche', 'Madonna', 'Dagny Juel'	Munch's fiancée Tulla; before the threat of being abandoned she pretends to be mortally ill. Munch comes, is so frightened — but later on cross. Through the loudspeakers Ducha's story is told. Her laughter is heard and a pistol shot is fired.	Woman in black begs Munch not to abandon her; a gun is fired
'Solitude'	'Woman in white'. Munch reaches out with his hand, but cannot touch her. A player is wearing a white gown, also a projected painting of 'The lonely one' on the wall.	Woman in white symbolised by a white gown hanging in one of the picture frames. Only in the final scene is the painting projected on the wall. At the same time, a player is dressed in the gown and standing like the woman in the painting, with her waist-length brown hair spread out, turned away. The Munch-player almost reaches her hair, paints the painting with his hand as brush, caressing. (The name of the scene is 'Solitude'.)
'Agony' and a series of other paintings	Munch is turned around and around in his hospital bed: agony, fear. He is put into a straitjacket.	
A series of women painted		The Munch-player's monologue expresses the painter's ambivalent attitude towards the woman, points towards reconciliation: I have painted my life.
'Sick girl'		Key event: Munch gets recognition; he chooses art before earthly love.

A framing action as a dramaturgical choice

At one stage of the production process, Group 1 planned to make a frame story, which should start a series of events. Through this frame story, all the fragments could be connected. The outline for this frame story is contained in the following text:

Sound of rain and wind. You can see Munch walking around in his garden lifting his paintings from place to place

Munch: My children, my children ...

Model: (Heard from inside the house). Mister Munch, Mister Munch come here, look what I have found: a box with a photo and a letter and a diary. Where are you, Mister Munch? Oh, there you are! (She hands over the box to Munch.)

Munch: Yes, it is my mother's letter to my sister Johanne Sofie. Mother wrote it when she knew that she would be dying soon from tuberculosis.

Model: Yes, it would not be unexpected if you get sick when you walk around in the rain.

Munch: I have inherited weak lungs from my mother and madness from my father. But I have above all written and painted. Can I have a look at my mother's letter now, please?

The sound of the rain fades out and the picture of the mother surrounded by the children is projected on to the wall. Munch takes the letter and looks at it; the model shivers and walks inside to get an umbrella.

Munch: (turned towards the picture on the wall). I will tell you what it was like. I was only five years old.

This scene was not directly included in the performance, but functioned as a step in the production process — which, among other aspects, consisted of a choice of performance elements that were prioritised over text-bound elements. During the work process, many moments were tried out that later on were excluded from the performance. Large gaps were deliberately left for the audience to fill out with their own interpretations.

Main patterns in transformations with inspiration from paintings by Munch

The main pattern is visible traces of the elaboration of the meaning potential in the woman in white, the woman in black and the woman in red. Besides the main painting, *Dance of Life*, a painting called *Separation* also provides material for the interpretations. In the painting *Separation*, the heart of the male is torn apart and is bleeding. Both groups experimented with multi-modal simultaneously revealed signs, and they chose to use performative metaphors more frequently than text-bound ones. They used montage techniques especially, as well as some film techniques. In both groups, there was a final scene with a monologue by the Munch-player. Group 1 chose to articulate its meaning in words. Its performance was also much longer in duration than that of Group 2. In Group 2's performance, there are some final words, but the last image is performative and wordless, though again with the Balinese Quartet playing. Group 1 returns to the starting point after having made a loop, like a circle with episodes. Its final image is also wordless, a dance (*Dance of Life*), with the same music as in the beginning and with the heartbeat. By ending where the performance started, it becomes very evident that the group has made an interpretation of the dance of life, seen through the lenses of an artist's life. I conclude the analysis of the transformations by placing the use of theatrical signs in a matrix (see Table 2).

Table 2: The signs of theatre as meaning-creating elements

<i>Signs of theatre</i>	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>

The space used for the theatrical event	A gymnastic hall with stations. The audience turned around from the middle of the hall. Stages at the walls (starting from a 'real' stage at one end of the hall).	A public community artists' house, a living room with the stage at one end of the room.
Light	White light; two spotlights.	Variations of coloured lights; several spotlights (administrated by a technician outside the group).
Sounds, music	Raindrops falling; heartbeat. Speech over loudspeakers, laughter; pistol shot. Music in the beginning and the end.	Cacophony, one strong voice, screaming 'Aaaargh!' Chorus: u-u-u as the wind of death. In a restaurant scene, ragtime music. String quartet music repeated three times as a sign of joy of life (Karen's story; Munch in Paris; the final scene when Munch is painting).
Image projections of Munch's paintings	Two projectors in use; oversize projections on large walls.	One projector; rather small projections on one white wall.
Artefacts (objects) Picture frames, free- standing upright, rectangular about 2 metres high.	Three frames used as markers of fiction.	Four frames as markers of structure and fiction.
Artefacts (objects)	The bed has a central function transformed into	A lighted candle at the death bed of the mother. The candle

Hospital bed with wheels; two tea cups;	the bed of the dead mother, a bed for loving; a bed for insanity; a bed for a sick person.	is moved into the next scene: the meeting with the woman in red in the future is planted through the candle.
Easel with paint brush; box with the picture of mother and her farewell letter;	Gossiping ladies sharing experiences regarding Munch as a lover. The identity of the painters.	
Candle	The frame story Candle when woman in black is talking; candelabra at 'the sick bed'.	
A figure (puppet), about 70 centimetres tall	Edvard Munch as a five-year-old	
Gowns, clothes	Red gown, white gown, black gown. Two hats for ladies.	Two red gowns, one white gown, three black gowns. Four black male hats and dress jackets.

Transformations through choice of theatrical signs

Free, upright frames as creative element

The teacher introduced frames that were possible to use and elaborate during the work process. The frames were produced during the working process of Group 1. Group 2 also chose to make frames. The frames are concrete artefacts, metaphors to mark 'into fiction' and 'out of fiction'. The frames functioned like meta-fictional comments. Figure 3 is a montage of pictures showing the use of frames in the performances. The frames contribute to making the aesthetic doubling visible, marking when a player is in the fiction and when the player 'freezes' in a position.



Figure 3: Wooden frames as part of the scenography; a white gown hanging in one of the frames

Both performances are 'pure', 'peeled off'. Artefacts are used very economically. Every use of signs opens up a possible interpretation, even if the choices of signs express the interpretations of the groups.

I comment on the choice of Group 2: to let the woman in white be represented by a gown without a person wearing the gown. As a symbol of innocence and longing, the communication is strong in choosing not to make a living person embody the white. Not until the last scene is there a woman dressed in the white gown, almost reachable for the longing artist — through the creative act of painting her. An inter-textual resonance is produced in the caressing hand-as-brush he uses when painting the woman in white; the same caressing hand-as-brush was used in an earlier scene in the meeting with Munch's first beloved, as a young man.

The projections on the wall are in dialogue with the actions or with the moods performed in the performance. The final scenes of the two performances both start with a monologue, acted out by the Munch-player. After the monologue, the performance opens up a horizon for continuous creative work. Group 1 made a longer monologue for the Munch-player as a final summing up than did Group 2. Group 2 made fragments of the painter's inner dialogue with himself audible on more than one occasion. I quote the two monologues below.

Group 1

Munch: (Meeting his three women in freeze frames; the black, the red and the white).

The woman in black represented the maturity of my art form. She is the beginning and the end. She has given life and she has lost. You cannot cheat her because she has seen too much and has experienced too much to be easily cheated. She is all my memories. She is the woman who no longer owns; she is in a being mode. The woman in black is the whole of life, she is the one we all become ...

The woman in red has given me most enjoyment but also the most pain. She is adventure and untamed energy. She is selfish and lives in the now, but she knows she will turn into the woman in black. She surrenders in love and has the painful beauty of a Madonna.

The woman in white is dwelling above, behind, before and after everything. She is strength without guilt and pure force. Without guilt, but also without experience. 'Nature is not the only visible an eye can see — it is also the inner images of the soul — the images on the other side of the gaze.'

CD with the music Platonic years with Nils Petter Molvær's Khmer is playing again. The group is dancing the dance of life like in the beginning.

Group 2 (different fragments)

Munch: I have been living my whole life half in a dream, half in reality. People have understood this and they have stuck their bestial teeth into my defenceless body while my soul has been out on a journey. The artist must choose either art or earthly love. Love must die. This is the law of life — with no mercy. I have adopted the words, no more married/poisoned [gifte in Norwegian] women.

Witches, monsters, birds of prey, goddesses of revenge (shouts) — why must all Satanic women tempt an innocent painter, only because I cannot get married? People in the old days said that love is like a burning flame. It burns down and you are left with a pile of ashes.

I have experienced a love that can move mountains, but I have never been able to say: 'Woman I love you, you are everything to me. I was lying in the mud among creepy things and slime — I longed to get up to the surface — I lifted my head above the surface of the water and then — I saw the swan — its shimmering whiteness — the pure lines I was longing for.'

The music of the Balinese Quartet is playing for the third time. The Munch-player turns towards the back of the woman in white — he is painting, caressing her beautiful hair — close, but not touching.)

Group 1 has chosen to make a philosophical reconciliation in summing up; the group members verbalise their interpretations. Group 2, in the fragments of a monologue, opens up more for a mood of being on a journey towards reconciliation with life through the symbolic signs used after the end of the monologue.

Reflections on the transformations

Transformations are part of every phase of the artistic learning process. The teacher transformed an idea to a suggestion to a pretext and a thematic elaboration. The students stepped into an experimental and elaborative work, which was structured like the episodic dramaturgy of process drama. The phase with process drama served as a mental as well as a sensuous entrance to the themes connected to art and life. The emotional involvement and the embodied expressions made in-depth exploration of some themes possible. The main teacher-thinking principles were to prepare for active aesthetic responses, to teach technique, form and genre, whenever substantive knowledge was needed. In doing so, an aesthetic doubling was made possible. What the doubling consisted of and how it was realised could, during the process, be raised to the level of self- reflection in the diaries of the students and to reflective dialogue during the process. In the arts education reflections shared among participants and teachers after the end of the projects, different dramaturgical choices were discussed and different dramaturgical models were tried out. In the next section, I mention some examples of aesthetic doublings that were produced in the working process. The doublings are all transformations of ideas.

Aesthetic doubling of time: Creating fictive times

Munch as five-year-old; Munch as an old man; Munch in different phases of his life; Munch and his artistry as a painter in a timeless stretch. Auntie Karen recounting memories of Munch as child. The Munch-player runs about as the child about whom Karen is telling — thus creating simultaneous layers of past and present time.

Aesthetic doubling through the creation of fictive places/spaces

Munch's childhood home; the restaurant 'Zum schwarzen Ferkel'; Dr Jacobsson's clinic; exhibition space; atelier; moods of madness; joy of life.

Aesthetic doubling through the building of a role character

Slightly marked roles, and roles with emotional involvement: Edvard Munch; the father; the mother; Auntie Karen, Ducha, Prybyzewski; Tulla, Eva, Mrs Heiberg, Doctor Jacobsson, people not understanding his art, art critics understanding the art of Munch; Hans Jaeger; symbols red, white, black.

A performative dramaturgy using montage as doubling of fictive layers

Concrete layer: the narrative thread.

Abstract layer: sub-text; interpretation through the use of symbols.

Metaphoric layer/thematic layer: the themes evolve, forming possible meanings. Universal human themes are articulated.

Techniques in use: montage and simultaneity; meta-fictive comments.

The paradox of drama

Through aesthetic doubling, it is possible to explore the paradox of drama: drama is about something, there is a subject substance, but this is not what drama is about. Edvard Munch's life and art as a pretext had a strong existential loading, a multi-dimensionality that made a thorough investigation of complex feelings possible.

One pedagogical consideration is whether these young students of around 25 years of age could have the necessary life experience to be able to have an involvement in such a multifaceted painter's life themes. These students had exceptionally good prerequisites in their knowledge of dramatic and cultural codes, and their openness to participate in a transforming artistic learning process. A general comment regarding drama work is that one can try out being a person you never will become, and thus learn something about the conditions of mankind. In drama, you can investigate what it is like being somebody else or something else — through the change of perspective it might be possible to learn about the possibilities and restrictions of life.

Sava's model of an artistic learning process

The Finnish researcher Sava (1995) has made an attempt to describe an artistic learning process. She has also outlined a model where transformation is a key concept. I connect the arts educational reflections to her model of an artistic learning process. Her point of departure is that all teaching — including teaching in art — has as the main task to promote and support learning.

Sava mentions three possible changes as a consequence of an artistic learning process. These are: (1) quantitative change in the amount of knowledge; (2) qualitative change in the form of an artistic-aesthetic interpretation at a higher level than earlier; and finally (3) a structural change in artistic, creative thinking and in how the person's imagination functions. She leans towards cognitive psychology, and her point of view is that teaching for artistic learning aims at structural changes in thinking. The changes that are relevant as a result of an artistic learning process also concern the learner's relation to the surrounding world and the inner activity of the individual mind, 'which encompasses visual, spatial and musical patterns of thought, the body image and inner schemas for the movements of the body, artistic-aesthetic systems for conceptual thinking and image thinking' (1995: 37, my translation).

Learning as transformation

According to Sava, the transformative force of art is central to artistic learning:

The concept transformation — conversion — points at an inner process, a process of interpretation, meaning-making and extensive change in the individual who experiences or performs or learns art ... Basically, it is a very dramatic experience mentally. After a strong artistic-aesthetic experience nothing in fact is like before in the person's inner reality. During the learning process the person through a phenomenon of transformation forms a piece of a new inner reality. (1995: 37).

Sava points out that the students are conscious and well-informed subjects for their own learning. It is quite obvious that the students are all expected to notice, reflect on and contribute to their individual learning. Sava asks about the extent to which the teaching consciously supports the students' self-knowledge and mental capacity to analyse their artistic-aesthetic activity as well as their capacity to both receive art and to be artists (1995: 38).

The Sava model is shaped like a circle, but the idea is that the artistic learning process is a loop that can be repeated like a spiral. The sensuous experience (everyday life, nature, culture, memories) is the starting point for all artistic-aesthetic activity. She argues that this is why it is so important to awaken and develop sensuous and emotional experience through a conscious arts education and thereby give these fragile experiences enough time to develop (1995: 60).

In the model, there is a second phase of the cyclic process. Then the teaching progresses from the sense-based and emotional experiences. The student might seem passive, because time is needed to integrate and articulate and listen to experiences, feelings and thoughts. It is a period involving individual work, which makes each of the students aware of their experiences. In this second phase, there is also a need for interaction and dialogue with others. In this dialogue, the individual's experiences are compared with the experiences of others. In this phase, the teacher functions as supervisor, asking questions regarding the piece of work, which the student then elaborates. It is also important that the teacher shares his or her knowledge to the extent to which it is relevant for the work the student does, and with the teacher's substance knowledge regarding the phase this process is in.

The Sava model contains a third phase, when the students can generalise and articulate their knowledge equally well metaphorically in the form of artistic structures and scientifically as concept structures in the continuous process. The fourth phase is when the student acquires (through production, analysis and reception of art) the concept world and the symbolic world of art.

As a fifth phase — or rather dimension — in the transformation work Sava mentions the mastering of the material of art, the concrete tools, as well as the mental-spiritual tools that are necessary in a holistic learning process. Sava mentions an agency of great importance in artistic work: preparedness to sense, engage in one's own feelings and art as a phenomenon; to be able to reflect upon and verbalise personal experiences, feelings and knowledge; to listen and receive the experiences and artistic expressions of others; to understand the symbolic and visionary language of art. This agency and this preparedness is a necessary prerequisite for artistic activity and productivity. Sava also stresses the importance of listening to others in the sharing of artistic experiences — she stresses this as a meaning-producing process, a process of interpretation and of giving something an importance, a value. Sava concludes her discussion about artistic learning processes in focusing on the closeness and relatedness between aesthetics and ethics. This, Sava suggests, is because the developed awareness and the expanding insight comprise an ability to carry an ethical responsibility for oneself, for others, for culture and for nature.

According to Sava, an artistic learning process contributes to the development of mental models in at least two ways: metaphorically, through the language of art; and verbally, through the articulation of concepts. The change an artistic learning process makes possible is described by Sava as a deep spiritual human insight, which implies a change in the individual's relationship to different aspects of human life, societal life, of nature and of thought.

Conclusion

The phases of an artistic learning process, according to the Sava model, can be recognised in the project *Dance of Life*. The students' own voices (their descriptions of their learning process) have, however, not been part of the dialogue in this article. The perspective chosen is the researcher's study of the research material, describing the observed transformations and the students' responses, their aesthetic responses to the challenges offered by Edvard Munch's art and life world. The aesthetic distance created by choosing this painter's life is very obvious, but the themes elaborated by the students have connections to their own life worlds, and to their experiences of loss, sorrow, love, commitment and the passion to

create something not yet seen. In the written evaluation of the project and response to Group 2, the teacher wrote:

We started in the art form and investigated rich material, consisting of Munch's paintings and texts, and of biographical material (Gavin Bolton calls this Mode 1: Intention to be). During the lessons we explored possible authentic themes through the genre of process drama. The drama students were already well prepared, through their competence at interpreting codes, for this kind of challenging and demanding work. The participants in the group were engaged and focused. Something that really has been a characteristic of this group is that when I have suggested an idea, given a hint, proposed something — so every individual has elaborated and developed the idea to a level of deep understanding. When we moved to Mode 2: Intention to present a production of performance type, then the focus of the group was clear: authenticity and meaning-making were the aim ...

In this article, I have attempted to point out possible elements in arts educational thinking and educational design thinking that can be used in aesthetic approaches to learning: teaching from an aesthetic standpoint, the importance of aesthetic distance, and the opening up of learning paths through aesthetic transformations serving the meaning-making process. To a large extent, these elements might be part of teacher-thinking from a cultural perspective. The challenge that can be articulated, if the point of view is teaching from an aesthetic standpoint, is only one aspect. The art form demands that the learner develops skills, craft; to respect the art form in question implies contributing to a dialogue about meaning through the means of artistic expression.

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