

Kirsi Rinne

Investigating  
Doctoral Studies  
in Two Finnish  
Art Universities

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This study concerns doctoral education and it examines the specificities of doctorates in art universities. It aims to create an understanding of the challenges of artistic dissertations that combine theoretical standpoints with the creation of artworks. The investigation is situated at the intersection of two fields and traditions, research on doctoral education, on the one hand, and the development of research in art universities, on the other.

Research activities were introduced into art education at the beginning of the 1980s. Uniting these two traditionally and historically separate worlds has instigated debates and challenges. The role of artwork in research and its contribution to knowledge has been widely discussed, as have the varying associated definitions. For many, the lack of a coherent understanding or an unambiguous definition of what constitutes research in art universities provides an exciting opportunity. Most writers wish to adopt an open attitude, support diverse views and refrain from imposing fixed parameters. (For example, Dombois et al., 2012 pp. 10–11; Biggs & Karlsson, 2011a, p. xiii; Borgdorff, 2011, p. 44)

The evolving conceptions of research and institutional guidelines provide the potential to conceptualize and shape the nature of research in many ways. (Ravelli et al., 2013, p. 417) The 2014 SHARE network publication considers research in art universities to be “widely contested” and discusses “contradictions and tensions that criss-cross the domain of artistic research education” (Wilson & van Ruiten, 2014, pp. III–IV).

My research interest has grown from my personal experience gained during the more than 10 years that I have participated in the everyday life of a Finnish art university. As the coordinator of research and doctoral studies at the Department of Film, Television and Scenography in the School of Arts, Design and Architecture of Aalto University, I, as well as most of my colleagues, have been engaged in the above discussion. Being in the position of both participant and observer, that is, studying art universities from the inside, has facilitated the research process but, at the same time, it has given rise to considerations regarding my position as interviewer.

From the outset, my interest in doctoral education has included this institutional aspect. I wished to combine the individual and the societal and to explore how these two areas interact. Educational researchers of doctoral pedagogy (for example, Pearson, 2005, p. 130) have called for complementary macro and micro-level studies and the need to recognize a broad range of interests. A socio-cultural approach seemed appropriate for my research. Recently in educational research, the focus has shifted from phenomenology



and social constructivism to materiality in learning. Things that are taken for granted, such as tools, technologies, actions and objects, as well as texts and discourses, are made visible and accounted for. The slogan “how matter comes to matter” in educational processes means that knowledge and capabilities emerge in webs between the human and the non-human. (Fenwick, 2010; Fenwick et al., 2011)

Of the theories emphasizing material aspects, cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) provided an opportunity to examine how micro-level doctoral experiences are intertwined with macro-level institutional practices, decrees and statutes, which guide policy-level decisions and, in the case of art universities, affect the art world as well.

The study started as an exploration into the supervision of artistic and practice-based doctorates. I determined that supervisory practices should be rethought within this evolving research culture. I was especially interested in the everyday discourse of dividing supervision between theory and art. Several studies have been published on different aspects of supervision, mostly from the point of view of a supervisor. A number of recent policy documents and evaluations carried out by ministries and other governmental bodies have emphasized the importance of supervision and have recommended actions to improve it. These reports and studies, as well as my experience as a member of the research administration, convinced me that supervision is a topic worth investigating.

However, and as often happens in the research process, after gathering the interview data, the emphasis evolved towards a more general understanding of how to support or mediate doctoral work. The data provided material for expanding the topic towards an exploration of the *experiences and perceptions*<sup>1</sup> of doing a doctorate. The initial themes were reinterpreted and changed.

Obviously, a doctoral journey consists of many phases, not all of which

1 In theoretical discourse, the concept of experience has been defined in various ways. It can be an expression of subjectivity, connected to personal history, a sign of objectivity or an act of practice. The meaning of experience is vague and, by its nature, it refers to the past. (Varto, 2013) It may be examined by taking the body as a unit of experience, which enables highlighting “the range of qualities that are material, personal and social in their meaning and significance” (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012, p. 679). In this study, experience is conceptualized as being connected to activities and is thought to be inseparable from those practical actions that doctoral students engage in during their study path. This view comes close to pragmatist philosophy, where thinking and experiencing are closely connected to practice and action. (Määttänen, 2012, p. 35)

are covered here. I asked about reasons for embarking on the doctoral journey but did not discuss specifically the application stage and procedures. Furthermore, a discussion on the final stages of a doctorate, including submitting the manuscript for pre-examination and the final public defence, are not included. Instead, this study focuses on those particular elements that emerged in the interviews as being essential for doctoral candidates<sup>2</sup>.

To address these issues and to achieve the outlined objective, the study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter Two discusses the context of the doctoral experience and Chapter Three the basic principles of the chosen theoretical framework and how they are applied in this study. Chapter Four presents recent research on the doctoral experience. Chapter Five outlines the dissertation's main research question and sub-questions and the research design (empirical material, methods for gathering data and choosing respondents, reflections and analysis). The key findings are presented in Chapter Six. Finally, Chapter Seven provides the conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2 There is no practical difference between a doctoral student and a doctoral candidate, although in some instances the latter is preferred if the student has guaranteed funding for his/her research (for Aalto University's recommendation, see Glossary of Academic Affairs by the Aalto University Language Centre). The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers (<http://www.eurodoc.net>. Retrieved January 12, 2014) recommends using the term doctoral candidate to strengthen the candidate's position as an early-career researcher. In this study, these terms are used interchangeably and as they appear in the source literature.

2 THE CONTEXT OF  
THE DOCTORAL  
EXPERIENCE

## 2.1 Introduction

I wish to present in considerable detail the research background and the context of doctoral studies because I see them as central to my research for several reasons. Research processes and doctoral projects do not take place in a vacuum but are affected by intellectual, social and organizational contexts. Various university systems, rules and structures constrain, steer and legitimize research. (Candy & Edmonds, 2011, pp. 120–121)

In other words, institutional structures have an impact on the everyday work of doctoral students and the efforts undertaken by them when working towards their final outcome. Although institutional rules and regulations are often, as such, invisible or implicit, these properties need to be taken into account because of their mediational capacity. (Daniels, 2009, p. 107) The processes and practices are framed with an array of both academic and artistic rules, documents, codes and guidelines that direct the attention of doctoral candidates.

In this chapter, I shall take a look outwards, towards those broader structures that shape the doctoral process, and discuss the organizational and intellectual context of doctoral studies in art universities.

## 2.2 Organizational context

### 2.2.1 FINNISH UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR DOCTORAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

The expansion and massification of doctoral education is a worldwide phenomenon and stems from the growing importance of research and innovation in the global knowledge economy. New knowledge and innovation are strategic resources and economic factors in today's society and in times when new forms of work and professions are emerging. (Nowotny, 2011, p. xxv; Thomson & Walker, 2010, p. 11) A knowledge-based society needs skilled workers to ensure the further creation of wealth, prosperity and well-being. (Nowotny, 2011, p. xix) These conditions are reflected in the growing amount of international, European and national initiatives, strategy

documents, reports and guidelines that are being drafted in order to reorganize doctoral education.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, a new university paradigm, which is concerned with performance indicators, efficiency and accountability, has emerged. (Kankaanpää, 2013, p. 11) Universities have been encouraged to carry out so-called structural developments, which in practice mean the creation of larger units and mergers. These developments are thought to positively affect the quality of research and education, as well as to facilitate the allocation of resources. (Aittola & Marttila, 2010, p. 4) In Finland, major university reform has increased the financial and administrative autonomy of its universities. (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 12)<sup>4</sup> These developments create new expectations, responsibilities and challenges for doctoral education, bringing with them measures to strengthen education and increase its quality. (Pearson & Brew, 2002, p. 135)

The Finnish doctoral system has become more structured and organized and universities exert greater control over the progress of doctoral candidates (Lahenius, 2013). The above changes and developments affect doctoral education in art universities, too. The emergence of research in art universities (which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter) is related to administrative decisions and ideologies, especially to the constant need for innovation and the production of new know-how (Kirkkopelto, 2007). Building larger units has taken place both in art and design and in the performing arts. Aalto University was established in 2009, merging Helsinki University of Technology, Helsinki Business University and the University of Art and Design Helsinki. In 2012, a decree was signed, merging the Theatre Academy, Sibelius Academy and the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts into the University of the Arts Helsinki. Research and teaching assessments and quality management systems are also part of everyday life in art universities. Thus, doctoral education within the current knowledge economy means a growing

3 For instance, see Karjalainen (2006), Dill et al. (2006) and Niemi et al. (2011). In Europe, the Bologna Process has been influential in this area and has aimed at the harmonization of higher education and at increasing the competitiveness and attractiveness of European education.

4 Rinne and Jauhiainen (2012) claim that the traditional university emphasizing “collegiality, loose structuring, professional bureaucracy and academic expertise, has been replaced by various corporate, service, entrepreneurial and managerial models and visions as the organizational principles of the university”. Accordingly, today’s university has variously been conceptualized as an entrepreneurial university, a manageristic university, a forum for academic capitalism or the Macdonaldization of higher education. (p. 90)

demand for efficiency and requires that students are given the means to acquire a wide range of employability skills. (Hopwood, 2010b, p. 829)

The emergence of so-called creative industries<sup>5</sup> and the increased consumption of artistic products have affected the institutionalization of research in art universities. The global changes in knowledge generation have increased the significance of applied and creative knowledge and new forms and ways of enacting, generating and communicating. In particular, new media have an economic potential and have created a global industry that necessitates a high level of knowledge and research. Academic institutions are expected to reconfigure their emphasis and approach to meet these demands. (Peters, 2012, p. vii; Allpress et al., 2012, p. 1)

Furthermore, increasingly more students are applying to engage in doctoral studies. The number of students pursuing doctoral studies in Finnish art universities has increased steadily during the last 20 years. A simple search of the KOTA and Vipunen online services<sup>6</sup> reveals that the number of doctoral students in art universities has increased from circa 100 at the beginning of the 1990s to more than 500 in 2013.

In Finland, a doctoral degree consists of a publicly examined dissertation and coursework, of approximately 60 ECTS credits, that is planned on an individual basis and designed to support the thesis. Students apply for doctoral education and the right to study is not limited to any particular time frame. There are no fees but, on the other hand, students do not automatically receive funding for their studies and have to apply either for paid doctoral candidate positions or they rely on funding obtained from private foundations. The emphasis is without doubt on the doctoral thesis, which is always published, either as a monograph or as a number of articles in peer-reviewed journals, with a separate summary. (Pyhältö et al., 2012) The system is flexible but, recently, various policy measures have guided the system towards a more structured direction.

5 The creative or cultural industries are defined as activities originating in individual creativity, skill and talent and potentially leading to new employment opportunities. (Flew, 2002)

6 The Kotaplus service was maintained by the Ministry of Education and Culture and offered statistical data on universities and fields of education from 1981. Retrieved December 27, 2014 from: <https://kotaplus.csc.fi/>. From 2005 onwards, the statistics are compiled by the Opetushallinnon tietopalvelu. Retrieved December 27, 2014 from: [http://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/\\_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Yliopistokoulutuksen%20opiskelijat-nakokulmalyliopisto.xlsb](http://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Yliopistokoulutuksen%20opiskelijat-nakokulmalyliopisto.xlsb).

## 2.2.2 REQUIREMENTS IN ART UNIVERSITIES

In the Finnish legislation on doctoral education, the objectives of research and doctoral education are to develop academic expertise and to produce new scientific knowledge. The objectives are outlined in the Government Decree on University Degrees (Section 21: Scientific and artistic postgraduate education<sup>7</sup>). The first goal is to become familiar with the field of study, and its social significance, and to gain skills to apply scientific methods independently. Further, it is expected that students are able to apply scientific methods and contribute to new knowledge. The second objective is to become familiar with the development, problems and methods of the field of study, while the third concerns gaining knowledge of the general theory of science.<sup>8</sup> Two paragraphs define the objectives of research in art universities. The student is expected to “gain knowledge and skills for independently conceiving methods of artistic creation or creating products, objects or works which fulfil high artistic demands”. In addition, the quality of research-related artworks (products, objects, transactions or works) “should fulfil high artistic demands”. These objectives are different for the fields of art and design and for fine arts, music, theatre and dance.

As always, the above statutes are interpreted and manifested at the grass-root level, where the activity itself takes place, that is, in the specific degree regulations and guidelines on supervision, pre-examination and public defence. Four art universities (music, theatre, fine arts, and art and design<sup>9</sup>) have introduced slightly different requirements based on the above-mentioned section in the legislation. These concern mainly diverse regulations on the written components and the focus of the research. (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 19)

The degree requirements and regulations at Aalto University, School of

- 7 In the Finnish legislation, the term “postgraduate” is a slightly misleading term but nevertheless refers to doctoral studies, or more precisely, studies pursued after a Master’s degree. This translation is adopted because an intermediate or predoctoral degree of licentiate is still available in some Finnish universities, for example at the Theatre Academy.
- 8 In 2013, a new requirement was added to the legislation. It concerns employment abilities; more precisely, the doctoral student should gain sufficient communication and language skills so that he/she is able to handle specialist and development tasks and to work in an international collaboration.
- 9 Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture and University of Lapland, Faculty of Art and Design belong to the field of art and design.

Arts, Design and Architecture closely follow the text of the decree. A dissertation may include art and design productions or products but the weights to be given to the artistic and written components are not explicitly stated. The relationship between them has been defined as dialogical and analytical, and the definition of these keywords has been debated. (Rinne & Sivenius, 2007, p. 1091) For example, Mäkelä and O’Riley (2012) define “the work as an integrated amalgam of various activities where thought and action operate in unison and in dialogue” (pp. 9–10). The artistic projects should be of high quality and be meaningfully connected to each other. In the written component, the aims, methods and results of art productions or design projects should be clarified.<sup>10</sup>

At the Theatre Academy,<sup>11</sup> the postgraduate degree regulations were reformulated at the beginning of 2015. The new regulations state that the aims of doctoral studies are to develop and renew art and to engage in a critical dialogue with society, “make art and produce knowledge, skills and understanding based on artistic practices that can be used and applied both in the arts and in other fields in society”<sup>12</sup>. The terminology “written section or part” of the previous regulations<sup>13</sup> has been replaced by “commentary”, which can be a monograph or at least three peer-reviewed publications and a summary or a web publication or “other multimedial form”. In contrast to the previous regulations, the length of the monographs is set at 150–200 pages. The requirements of the commentary are defined in more detail; it should present the aims, methods, structure and results of the undertaken research.

The artistic component must consist of one to three performances or demonstrations. Additionally, workshops or “other kinds of performative arrangements” are possible and their scope is determined by credit points. The previous degree requirements emphasized that the methods and structures

10 <https://into.aalto.fi/display/endoctoraltaik/Dissertation+and+Graduation>

11 This abbreviated form is used throughout the text, the official name is Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

12 Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki / The Performing Arts Research Centre Tutke, degree requirements, 2015.

13 Postgraduate degree regulations, the Theatre Academy. Retrieved August, 11, 2013 from: [http://www2.teak.fi/general/Uploads\\_files/Tutke/postgraduate\\_degree\\_regulations.pdf](http://www2.teak.fi/general/Uploads_files/Tutke/postgraduate_degree_regulations.pdf); Postgraduate degree requirements, Theatre Academy. Retrieved August, 12, 2013 from: [http://www2.teak.fi/degree\\_requirements\\_tutke](http://www2.teak.fi/degree_requirements_tutke)



of research can vary and a list of possible models was provided.<sup>14</sup> Now, however, it is stated that the artistic components “shall display profound understanding of the research topic, and ability to approach the research problem in a mode that critically renews the particular field of art”. The previously used term “post-graduate” is replaced by “doctoral”.

## 2.3 Intellectual context

### 2.3.1 RESEARCH IN ART UNIVERSITIES: SCEPTICISM AND SUSPICIONS

The above legal and degree regulations set the frame for doctoral education and experiences. The other important contextual matter concerns the intellectual context of research in art universities. It has often been speculated upon how the artistic and academic communities, with seemingly divergent work methods, practices and conflicting standards and philosophies, could work together in the art university context. Academic research assumes that knowledge is communicable and impersonal, whereas creative practice emphasizes the personal and subjective. (Biggs & Büchler, 2011, p. 89) Furthermore, these two fields have traditionally ignored each other, and usually scientists are thought to be analytical and objective, while the driving forces for artists are frequently characterized as subjectivity, irrationality and the sublime. (Andersson, 2009) However, neither the conception of science as a strictly systematic activity, with a predetermined methodology and a clear end result, nor of art as a singularly unique, free and creative process (Kupiainen, 2011) characterize current research in art universities.

Because research activities are positioned at the interface of art and academia, tensions and controversies are inevitable. (Wilson and van Ruiten, 2014) Unification impacts both artistic and academic domains. The

14 These included: 1) art work, related skills method, the theory component; 2) exploratory performance and a theory component that explicates and supplements the art object; 3) series of experiments or demonstrations and related theorizing; 4) process-like study seeking a model for societal or artistic activity or that models those practices; or 5) method or invention and its theoretical reasoning. It was noted that regardless of the combination of the above, the study should justify its structure and methods so that the research can be evaluated.

discussion around artistic research, its contribution to knowledge and its methodological solutions, is caused by this uneasy but challenging tension. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 6)<sup>15</sup>

Many have asked why art universities started to emphasize research activities. The 2005 re:search project conducted by the European League of Institutes of Arts (ELIA) lists a number of reasons, which include, for example, the need to build a firmer knowledge base regarding different art forms and the quest for innovation. The impact of new technology, changing not only the way art is made and taught but also art itself, was also a major catalyst for change. Interdisciplinary collaboration with the sciences is getting off the ground and new roles are being developed in society for creativity and for arts graduates.

Immonen (2001, pp. 65–66) suggests that the doctoral degree in art universities was obtained on a qualification basis to standardize degree structures with those in science universities and to create tools for both analysing and expanding the understanding of art and artistic processes. Doctorates contribute to the dialogue between art and theory; they combine the making with the thinking of art (p. 66). Nevanlinna (2001, p. 59) maintains that the concept of doctoral degrees in the arts probably embraced the notion that the easiest way to improve the status and esteem of art education would be to remodel it according to the structure and terminology of science education.

An international comparison on the emergence of research initiatives in art universities reveals that structural higher education reforms brought art schools into the university system in the 1980s. Art schools used to be independent institutions, where the focus was on “artistic form, technique and context”, while universities developed “generic skills, disciplinary knowledge, and research capacity” (Webb and Melrose, 2014). Later, further educational reforms were introduced in Australia (Deakins Higher Education Reform) and in the UK (Dearing & Strand reports), which formed the basis for the development of research practices and degrees. (p. 138)

In Finland, no major reform could explain the “emergence of a vibrant

15 I have mainly relied on two sources when examining the development of research in art universities, *The Routledge Companion of Research in the Arts* (paperback edition 2011) and Borgdorff's dissertation *The Conflict of Faculties* (2012), a collection of earlier published articles and new texts. The other essential writings are Finnish books by Kiljunen and Hannula (2001), Hannula et al. (2005), Mäkelä and Routarinne (2006), Varto (2009) and Mäkelä and O'Riley (2012) and, in film, a collection of writings dealing with the demarcation between the making of and theorizing on film. (Myer, 2011)

research community in the arts school” (Kälve­mark, 2011, p. 6). The Finnish art universities are independent art academies, which is one of the central reasons for the development of research. Their independence means that they have been able to develop research activities without strict regulations. The historically strong position of art universities in Finland is based on the constitutional autonomy of universities and academic freedom in instruction, science and art.<sup>16</sup> Also, a strong pioneering spirit moved things forward. Finnish artists began to experiment, and the reflection came later. This approach is not without problems but “if we had waited for philosophers to reach a univocal solution to the terminological problems and the ontological and epistemological base, we would still be at the beginning” (Arlander, 2013, p. 7).

It seems that all over the world, the first steps of research in art universities were burdened by doubts and mistrust. According to Borgdorff (2012), the legitimacy of practice-based research is questioned mainly because “people have trouble taking seriously research which is designed, articulated, and documented with both discursive and artistic means” (p. 55). Ravelli et al. (2013) note that “compared to other disciplines with a longer history in the academy, participants in these fields often feel as if they operate at its edge, having to constantly justify their particular forms of creative work as legitimate research” (p. 396). In Finland also, the inception of doctoral education was characterized by scepticism. Both science universities and the academic staff within other universities questioned the rationale of a doctoral education in art universities. (Hovi-Wasastjerna, 2006, p. 7; Sotamaa, 2006, p. 4)

In the UK, suspicions about the credibility or validity were at their highest at the beginning of the 1990s, when the number of institutions awarding practice-based doctorates in art grew considerably. Validation committees were composed of members who were not from the art and design community and, hence, not necessarily familiar with the visual language. (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2002, p. 37) Candlin (2000) describes how, in 1997, governmental bodies, such as the Higher Education Quality Council and the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE), expressed a wish to clarify the use of new doctoral titles and “to protect the significance of the PhD/DPhil”, in order to prevent the devaluation of existing doctorates. Although the UKCGE was sympathetic to practice-based research, it nevertheless expressed doubts about the capacity of images to function as research. (Candlin, 2000) In Australia, the adoption of a research orientation was neither simple nor

16 The Constitution of Finland 731/1999; Universities Act 558/2009.

swift but was actively resisted and, at the beginning of the 2000s, was still “far from resolved” (James, 2003, p. 16).

Borgdorff (2012) writes that “the history of science shows that new research objects, methods, and claims always meet resistance” (p. 61). For example, the scepticism towards interpretative approaches and the epistemologies, theoretical foundations, methodologies and procedures of qualitative research in the 1980s are a parallel development to that of research in art universities. (Chenail, 2008) Hard sciences considered qualitative scholars as journalists or fiction writers and their research as unscientific, subjective and impossible to verify. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, pp. 10–11) Varto (2009) maintains that the justifications for and foundations of a new discipline are difficult for scientific communities and are often subjected to “unjustified criticisms from representatives of established sciences”. Critical stances may lead to research that is carried out according to unsuitable criteria because it is performed to “suit the wishes of the critics” (p. 139). Biggs and Karlsson (2011b, p. 409) also write about sceptical stances towards qualitative data and note that today’s understanding of interpretative approaches exists after a long struggle.

Academia is not a stable system and its boundaries are not fixed. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 232) Every new discipline has to struggle with legitimacy and deal with controversies when scientific disciplinary boundaries evolve in the wake of new discoveries. Rapid developments increase the likelihood of tensions and contradictions since the formal organizational structures cannot keep pace with scientific progress. (Tuunainen, 2005b, p. 206) Frequently, the existing formal institutional arrangements at universities are not well prepared to respond to the challenges to modernize research traditions.

Scientific disciplines and research traditions have been conceptualized as social worlds or communities of practice that are amorphous and lack clear boundaries. Some are willing to engage in reform, while others wish to maintain the status quo. (Tuunainen, 2005b, p. 206) Similarly, the art world could be understood as a particular community of practice that, when the research activities in art universities were started, penetrated an established organization, academia. The state of flux, where boundaries were crossed and resistance encountered, resulted in confrontations and fissures. Such a creative and tension-producing mismatch is usually a source of effective change. (Clot, 2009, pp. 290, 295) It transforms both internal activities and external systemic conditions and should not be ignored but accepted as part and parcel of any evolving activity. Research in art universities has been, and

still is, in constant flux, where “tensions, disturbances and local innovations are the rule and engine of change” (Crossouard, 2008, p. 53).

Nowotny (2011) notes that the institutionalization of art universities produces disagreements, doubts and controversies but “productive contestations are also the defining characteristic of any significant innovative enterprise” (p. xvii). The creative growth of a certain field of research and various tensions and controversies are “a true breeding ground of creativity, be it scientific or artistic” (Paltridge et al., 2011, p. 253). Conflicts need to be temporarily set aside in order to achieve a common goal. A unanimous outcome cannot be reached quickly, the process inevitably takes time.

### 2.3.2 HOW DOES ONE DEFINE RESEARCH IN THE ART UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Even today a strong tendency exists to consider actual art-making as research, that is, “the art speaks for itself” or “the work of art or the process would somehow articulate itself” (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 28). Thus, it is claimed that artists performing research is not at all a new phenomenon. In the history of film, both early Russian film-makers, such as Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein, and the French new-wave film directors, Jean-Luc Godard, Robert Bresson, among others, analysed their work through essayistic writing but also with reference to scientific concepts. They aimed at deconstructing existing conventions and, most importantly, creating new artistic, technical or production-related expression, working with questions that had originated in practical work and then intertwining the work with theoretical discussion. (Helke, 2006, pp. 7–8) A similar point is made by Borgdorff (2011): “A historiography of artistic research might show that, from the Renaissance to the Bauhaus, there has always been research conducted in and through artistic practices” (p. 47).

Likewise, Wollen (2005, p. 73) emphasizes and refers to his own experience, namely that theorizing about film and the practical activity of film-making are often seen as mutually exclusive and he reminds us that many film-makers, such as Eisenstein, Hitchcock and Kubrick, conceptualized montage, *mise-en-scène*, cinematography and editing. Theory has been attached to professional film-making or practice and the two have consistently been closely connected. Jean-Luc Godard, for example, insisted that the premise of film-maker-spectator theorists should be continually re-examined against the ideas of structural film and experimental narrative. Similar

tendencies have been discussed in relation to conceptual and feminist art practices, as well as other art forms.<sup>17</sup>

In his inaugural lecture, Kirkkopelto (2007) established his definition of research in terms of its institutional position. Artistic research is undertaken in an art university: it differs from the research carried out in the arts and humanities since it is based on art-making and on the artist's initiative and is connected to practices and forms and the artist's own experiences. It differs from other exploratory artistic practices in its interest in theoretical matters and aims at theory formation and challenging existing theories. Research in an art university concerns questions of reality, it restructures and criticizes existing conceptions using the methods of artistic work.

Therefore, the context within which research activities are undertaken is crucial. Art is no longer validated only by the artistic field but is judged within a different network, the academic context where institutional norms, professional and pedagogical practices and frames of judgement differ. (Candlin, 2000) As such, artistic research has existed in some form, but only during the last 30 years has it become an institutionalized, publicly supported field of research (Kirkkopelto, 2007) and "part of university life and of doctoral programmes" (Candy & Edmonds, 2011, p. 122).

Kirkkopelto's (2007) definition is useful because it bypasses the vast and still ongoing discussion on how we talk about research activities in art universities. Various terms are used more or less interchangeably and the pluralistic use varies both in national and international discussions and between institutions within any one country. (Lebow, 2008, p. 205; Mäkelä et al., 2011) This is exemplified in the findings of Biggs & Büchler (2011), according to which

artistic research is rejected by the design community; creative research suggests that other research is not creative; practice-based research

17 In the field of theatre and film, the British Parip project (2001–2005) was active and influential when the conditions for research in the performing and audiovisual arts were being developed. The main theme dealt with the definitions of practice as research in drama, theatre and dance, as well as in film, TV and video, and the division between research and professional practice. (Piccini, 2003) The project identified the range of higher education institutions engaged in practice as research and developed knowledge about evaluation criteria. In addition, a series of creative projects were examined and the possibilities of digital technologies "for the documentation and dissemination of best practices" were noted.

does not clarify how practices leading to research outcomes differ from practices leading to professional outcomes (p. 82).

Thus, creativity is not just a feature of design or art practices or research in art universities, “other disciplines are inherently and fundamentally creative in terms of how ideas, theories and practices develop” (Mäkelä & O’Riley, 2012, p. 10).

The most common of the terms used today are practice-based research, practice-led research and practice as research. In Europe, the term artistic research is increasingly prevalent, although “it may sound peculiar to native English speakers” (Borgdorff (2011, p. 39). A simple cross-reference in the comprehensive index of the Routledge Companion (2012, pp. 447–457) indicates that the most popular term is arts-based research (N=15), followed by practice-based research (N=8). The other indexed terms are art practice research, art-based and arts-based research, creative writing research, design research, performance research, practice-led research, research in and through arts practice, time-based arts research and visual/performing arts research (or vice versa). Surprisingly, artistic research does not merit an entry of its own in the index but appears under other entries, such as context, contingency, creative process and iconography. A quick glance at the bibliography compiled by SHARE reveals that the most common concept is artistic research, followed by arts-based research and research in art and design. In Australia, the term creative art has been used as “the standard catch-all” for all visual and performing arts. (Baker et al., 2009, p. 4)<sup>18</sup>

In this study, I use the terms artistic research and practice-based research rather interchangeably and support Kirkkopelto’s contextual notion of research.

In all of these definitions the centrality of art practice in research is acknowledged. This practice is not just the motivating factor or subject matter of the work but is indispensable to the research process itself. In a methodological sense, “research takes place in and through the acts of creating and performing” (Borgdorff, 2011, pp. 44–46). Hence, artistic research is distinct because of the vitality of having practice serve as the subject,

18 During the last 20 years, a number of articles and books have been published and numerous conferences organized on the integration of art and research and what artistic research is about. The SHARE network bibliography lists a total of 154 authored and edited books, journals, conference proceeding and series, yearbooks and reports. Retrieved February 6, 2015 from: <http://www.sharenetwork.eu/artistic-research-overview/bibliography#authored%20books>.

method, context and outcome of the research. The content (subject) is usually difficult to verbalize, it is experiential and may present an ontological dilemma. Methodological issues concern embodied knowledge and experiences that are constituted in and through practices, actions and interactions. These actions take a form that is difficult to justify, explain or rationalize. The contextual issues relate to the fact that “the relevance of the subjects and the validity of the outcomes are weighed in the light” (p. 47) of both the artistic and the academic contexts. The deliverables of artistic research are non-conceptual, non-discursive, and performative, they are embodied forms of experience, knowledge and criticism. One can legitimately ask what their epistemological status is. (Borgdorff, 2011, pp. 45–47)

If these conceptualizations are accepted, it becomes obvious that the traditional models of research – formulating a research question, choosing a method, collecting and analysing data, and producing deliverables – do not necessarily apply to research in art universities. (Bell, 2006, pp. 90–93) Artists concentrate on successfully developing their project, and do not primarily draw generalizable conclusions from their practice per se. The methodology of the artist’s research is tied to the context, and the focus of reflection is to facilitate their practice and to make an art object – not an abstract knowledge object.

These views are central to this study because it is assumed that the overall systemic whole, such as the discussion on the nature of research in art universities, is closely connected to the experience of undertaking a doctoral degree. It constitutes the context for doctoral work and is the first issue encountered when an artist enters academia. The current research situation sets the frame of reference for studies and is therefore the first mediating tool at the beginning of the doctoral path. Therefore, because of its mediational capacity, the above debate is hypothesized to be of importance to the doctoral experience in art universities.

### 2.3.3 PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION

When research and doctoral studies in art universities are being investigated, it is important to note how conceptions of knowledge formation have been redefined in recent years. Practice has undergone a renaissance: the theory-dominated view of scientific research has started to make way “for ideas centering on practice” (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 192). According to the thinking of the main proponents of the so-called practice turn, such as Schatzki and



Knorr Cetina, practices are not only routines based on tacit knowledge, but also contain dynamic, creative, constructive and normative actions. Practices involve “physical and mental activities of human bodies, material environment, artifacts and their use, context that contain understanding, human capabilities, affinities and motivation” (Kuutti, 2013). This means that artistic research as an activity, action, practice or practical activity creates knowledge and epistemic practices/things, and enables the emergence of both the new and the unforeseen. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 193)

Knorr Cetina’s (2001) research concerns a better understanding of epistemic practices. Her focus is on how creative and constructive practices emerge when non-routine problems are encountered during research. She refers to Hans-Jörg Rheinberger’s concept of epistemic things<sup>19</sup>, which are “any scientific object of investigation that is at the center of a research process and in the process of being materially defined” (p. 190). Objects of knowledge, rather than being something definitive, are open, question-generating and complex processes and projections.

Focusing on practice is obviously closely related to artistic research. The above conceptions of epistemic things bear similarities to the objects worked on in artistic practice. They lack completeness and unfold indefinitely, they continually acquire new properties and can never be fully attained.

Of equal relevance is the concept of experimentation and an experimental system, where the centre of interest is on practice rather than on a theoretical system. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 198) Artistic modes of investigation often require an experimental spirit; it is one particular form of experimentation. (Newman, 2013, p. 3) Both artists and scientists need to constantly create something new. Furthermore, processes of scientific and artistic discovery are both chaotic and unplanned and, in the case of the former, the “linearity and stringency” are “mostly constructed afterwards” (p. 2).

Additionally, Grierson (2012, p. 67) writes about a generative praxis and asks “how to turn forms of creative practice – art and text – into praxis”. The

19 In Rheinberger’s thinking, an experimental system is twofold and comprises both epistemic and technical things. The first is an epistemological or scientific object that, in the course of research, is manipulated and redefined in changing experimental contexts. This context forms the second element, the materials and methods for experiments, a technical condition or ‘technical thing’. (Tuunainen, 2005a, p. 116) Technical objects – in the form of apparatus, infrastructures, processes, etc. – can at the same time be characterized as consequences of and investments in experimental systems. As investments, they make new epistemic things possible. Relationships between epistemic things and technical objects inside experimental systems are thus necessarily functional and dialectical. (Schwab, 2013, p. 10)

generative form of praxis implies a working relationship at the interface of opposing and confusing ideas, such as different lineages of knowledge. The praxis is generative when the separated and normative categories of art and science are dismantled by putting them to work in a relationship of practical action. Both writing and art-making are “forms of practice for the identification of research questions and generation of ideas for the adoption of a new body of work” (p. 65) and have the capacity to create something new. It requires “risk-taking, making unlikely connections, accepting failure and success, and transferring this knowledge to others via a range of aesthetic practices” (p. 65).

In general, it seems that research activities in art universities have now reached a stage where, rather than emphasizing what is distinctive to science or to art, the object of inquiry is to find a shared ground between the two. These parallels can be observed in the above-mentioned concepts of practices and experimentation. Experimental laboratory work and artistic practice bear similarities, in that both are characterized by intuition, serendipity and improvisation. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 210) Within an experimental system, one does not know in advance what the end result is going to be, thus, in experimental systems, unprecedented events or surprises occur. (Schrivener & Zheng, 2012)

As Nicolini (2013, pp. 2–4) has demonstrated, existing practice theories<sup>20</sup> emphasize socio-cultural practices in everyday doing. The world around us is made and remade in practices, that is, these practices structure our experiences. Activity, performance and work create and maintain all aspects of social life. Furthermore, practice theories foreground body and material and individuals are seen as agents, as initiators and performers. Practice theories are influential because of their ability to overcome the earlier dichotomies or “dualisms of actor/system, social/material, body/mind and theory/action” (p. 2).

In addition to understanding artistic research as practice and activity, researching doctoral education in a similar manner has many advantages. Cummings (2010) has re-conceptualized doctoral education within the theories of practice and, in his integrative model on doctoral education,

20 According to Nicolini (2013), practice theories include the praxeology of Giddens and Bordieu, communities of practice by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (practice as tradition and community), CHAT (practice as activity), ethnomethodology, Schatzki's conceptions (as derivatives of Heidegger and Wittgenstein) and the Foucaultian notion of practice as discourse.

“contemporary doctoral practices and arrangements are seen as mutually constituted and continuously evolving” (p. 26). Korpiaho (2014) relies in her dissertation on the concept of practical activity which means understanding the everyday life, daily activities and concern of practitioners, in her case students and academic workers in business education.



3 EXPERIENCES  
IN THE SOCIO-  
CULTURAL  
CONTEXT

### 3.1 Material turn in educational theories

This study focuses on a specific pedagogical field, namely doctoral education in an art university. Recently, educational theories have encountered a shift away from hermeneutic, narrative and phenomenological perspectives and strategies for incorporating materiality in learning.<sup>21</sup> Rather than taking material as natural or a given, socio-material analysis acknowledges that material and humans interact when objects and knowledge are created and constructed. Knowledge emerges in the webs and interconnections between material and human interactions and material and discursive practices. “The material includes tools, technologies, bodies, actions and objects”, (...) “texts and discourses” (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. vi), not as separate entities but rather entangled in meaning.

Rethinking material practice in educational research is foregrounded in complexity theory, CHAT, actor-network theory (ANT) and theories of spatiality. The practice theories discussed in the previous chapter (Schatzki’s theory of practice, Knorr Cetina’s conceptions) have socio-material orientations, as have critical realism (both material and non-material entities as real), embodied knowledge in feminist writings, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notions on rhizomes and machines, material cultural studies and sociologies of technology. (Fenwick et al, 2011, viii)

These post-humanist perspectives revolve around the question of how disparate elements are linked and reconfigured through the practices of materialization, how they endure in time and space. Ambivalences, uncertainties and contradictions are evident. (Fenwick, 2010) Foregrounding materiality also means that conventional binaries in educational research, such as theory/practice, knower/known, subject/object, doing/reflecting, are questioned. (Fenwick & et al., 2011, vii)

Similarly, Bolt (2012) reviews new materialism in the creative arts and argues that returning to matter and abandoning the “privilege given to humans” (p. 3) can be attributed to scientific discoveries and changes in

21 The renewed interest in materialism is discussed in greater detail in, for instance, Coole and Frost (2010), who relate it to advances in the natural sciences, namely increased knowledge of complex issues such as climate change, global capital and population flows. (p. 5)

human-technological relationships. The materiality of the arts has disappeared because, in cultural theories, material has vanished “into the textual, the linguistic and the discursive” (p. 4). Since the power of matter can no longer be ignored, it is important to examine the materiality of creative arts practices. This has probably been considered as self-evident and thus has gone unnoticed, although each art field has a “unique relation to the matter of things” (p. 4) and collaborates closely with various instruments, technologies and material processes. Both matter and meaning are needed in the creation of the new. The welcome collection of writings “negotiates the relations between the various bodies that enable art to come into being – the material bodies of artists and theorists, the matter of the medium, the technologies of production and the immaterial bodies of knowledge that form the discourse around art” (p. 7).

Set against these reflections on materiality, I now review CHAT and try to elucidate how it could assist in understanding the dialectic between artistic and research activities and doctoral education in art universities.

## 3.2 Cultural historical activity theory

### 3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

CHAT<sup>22</sup> offers a useful framework within which to investigate doctoral education because it focuses on everyday human life, with object-oriented activities at its core. These activities are situated in a collective context and are evolving. Furthermore, activity theory is a practice-based theory that seeks to explain the unity of doing and thinking, a dialogue between theory and practice. (Sannino et al., 2009, pp. 2–4; Díaz-Kommonen, 2002, p. 52) It provides a lens for considering academic work in art universities and helps to make sense of what takes place both on institutional and individual levels.

Activity theory is a multidisciplinary theory that is based on a dialectical understanding of knowledge and thinking and is focused on the creative

22 Throughout this text, I use the general terms of activity theory and CHAT often interchangeably and, at the same time, acknowledge that several competing schools of thought and debates exist but this study does not address them.

potential of human cognition. (Sannino et al., 2009, p. 4) As in artistic research, theory and practice are intertwined and research is in the service of practice so that changes can be achieved (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 79). Moreover, it allows for weaving together the personal and the structural, and provides a glimpse into how the subject operating as a part of a community sees his/her practice. (Díaz-Kommonen, 2002, p. 58) In other words, activity theory helps to target both individual and institutional practices, which, in the case of this study, oscillate between the art community and academia. Individual and group actions are interpreted against the background of an entire activity system and human activity is situated in the collective context. (Engeström, 2001, p. 136)

In their review of CHAT, Fenwick et al. (2011, p. 72) conclude that CHAT provides important theoretical resources for capturing the relationship between mind, society and materiality. In CHAT, social, material, semiotic and psychological processes are unified and dialectically constituted. Activity theory was originally developed in psychology but it has been expanded into a more general, multidisciplinary approach as used in a number of other fields, such as education, working life, technology-intensive knowledge practices, innovations and new forms of agency and collaboration.<sup>23</sup>

The theoretical introduction of an activity system in this study is by necessity limited and condensed and only includes elements relevant to the investigation at hand. I have relied on second-hand sources when explaining its origins later in the text. I have by and large steered clear of the critical commentaries on the CHAT framework (see, for example, Engeström, 2008), but nevertheless acknowledge that every theory has its “own contradictions, unresolved tensions, and substantive gaps” (Stetsenko, 2005, p. 71). However, I hope that this approach is not only a mechanical application (Sannino, 2011a, p. 9) but that it also assists in adding to an understanding of the nature of doctorates in art universities. Accordingly, I describe my approach as infused with CHAT and inspired especially by the studies of Hopwood (2010a,b) and Hopwood and colleagues (Hopwood & Stocks, 2008; Hopwood et al., 2011; Hopwood & Paulson, 2012), and will use it as a reference for analysis in Chapter Six, where the empirical part of the thesis is discussed.

23 University of Helsinki, CRADLE, Center for Research in Activity, Development and Learning. Retrieved July 15, 2012 from: <http://www.helsinki.fi/cradle/info.htm>.



### 3.2.2 BASIC PRINCIPLES

CHAT scrutinizes everyday human life with object-oriented activities at its core. These activities are situated in a collective context and are historically evolving. (Sannino et al., 2009, pp. 2–3) As discussed, activity theory incorporates collective and individual experiences and overcomes the dichotomy of subject (micro-level) and societal (macro-level) structures. (Sannino, 2011b) One of the central notions in CHAT is that people, both individually and collectively, can and do change; they learn to become authors of their own lives and of the world around them. In short, they do not strictly recreate and adapt to existing situations but modify situations for their own purposes. Moreover, this individual and collective change process, is both symbolic and material. (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 75)

Activity theory has gained popularity because it takes into account cultural and organizational contexts and also directly focuses on day-to-day practical work, thus providing a unifying approach. It investigates human practices and common activities that are oriented towards an object and that are socially and culturally influenced. (Heikinheimo, 2009, p. 64)

The theory finds its origins in the collective consciousness and in a “Marxist focus on the historical, social and economic foundations of thinking and acting” (Edwards, 2007, p. 1). Bridging theory and practice, both theoretically and concretely, can be traced to the work of the Russian psychologists Lev Vygotsky and Aleksei Leontjev, who studied educational practices extensively. The former concentrated on artefact-mediated activities and the latter expanded the analysis from individual action to collective activity. (Heikinheimo, 2009, p. 69) Leontjev developed a theory of object-oriented activity as a unit of analysis, emphasizing the contextual elements in analysing subjective phenomena. (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012, p. 45) In addition, the Russian philosopher Evald Ilyenkov conceptualized the dialectical nature of the relationship between action and activity. (Sannino, 2011a, p. 2) Vygotsky’s and Leontjev’s thinking is, in turn, based on the dialectical tradition in philosophy (Miettinen, 2009, p. 160) and on Marxist dialectical materialism, where Cartesian mind-body dualism is not possible but where humans are studied within the context of meaningful actions. (Kuutti, 2005)

The principles of activity theory have been debated and modified both theoretically and empirically during recent decades. (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 56) The reading and treatment in this thesis is based on Yrjö Engeström’s development of activity theory, which in the late 1980s reinterpreted Vygotsky’s and

Leontjev's ideas and which incorporates a new conception of activity and its structure. Engeström's thinking is an expanded version of a mediational triangle as a unit of analysis. (Kuutti, 2005) The emphasis is on the collective activity system, which should be regarded in relation to other activity systems and "interpreted as multivoiced, including a community of multiple points of view, traditions, interests and interactions between participants" (Lektorsky, 2009, pp. 78–79). Also, the notion of contradictions as a source of change is essential.

As discussed, activity theoretical research seeks to explain and influence qualitative changes in human practices over time. Change and learning do not occur in isolation but are social and collective and are bound to the cultural context. Transformations occur when collaborative practices between and within activity systems are reorganized and renegotiated. (Engeström, 1999) An analysis based on activity theory offers a method for examination of "how complicated real-world data sets are intertwined with the context beyond individual activities" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2007, p. 479).

Engeström's well-known and often referred to triangle, depicting nodes and two-way influences (Engeström, 1987), demonstrates the basic principles of activity theory. The triangular model accentuates that a human act is not just a response to a stimulus but is mediated by a cultural component. (Sannino, 2011a, p. 2)

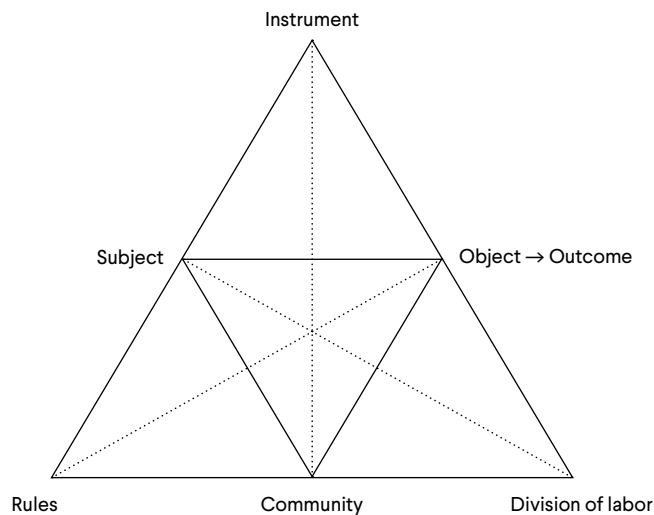


FIGURE 1 — The structure of a human activity system. After Engeström (1987)

In short, activity theory involves interrelated elements: the subject (person involved in the activity), the object (what is being worked on) and the mediating tools (resources, concepts, material artefacts). To transform objects into outcomes requires time and is dependent on other people performing roles within a particular division of labour (who does what). Explicit or implicit, formal or informal rules govern the activity. Motivation is required to reach the desired outcome, that is, to translate the object into an outcome. (Hopwood & Stocks, 2008, p. 189)

The activity theoretical approach focuses on purposeful human actions that are mediated by material and linguistic tools and instruments. Activities are oriented towards a specific object, which is not precisely known beforehand but is concretized in the activities in which the participants engage. The object is shared and socially constructed, it contains divergent views and uses creatively cultural and interactional resources. No existing perspective on the object can be automatically assumed as “right”, rather the rightness is defined within an activity. (Kuutti, 2011, p. 2) Organized and goal-oriented actions transform the object into an objective.

Objects motivate the activity on more than just the individual level. Objects/Motives, as Fenwick et al. (2011, p. 65) conceptualize them, have a broader relevance, they are units of “actively, symbolically and materially produced social concerns”. (...) We find patterned human practice, we find people adapting to and transforming the object/motives of activity” (p. 66). The object of activity is a sense maker, it anchors and contextualizes subjective phenomena in the objective world.

The salient feature of CHAT is its dynamic nature. Activities are historically formed and they carry with them the history of their development in various residuals, forms that were once adequate but which are less so, outdated ways of working, outmoded ideas and concepts. (Kuutti, 2011, p. 2)

The contemporary development of CHAT has concentrated on the effects of overlapping activity systems, on “the ways the activity systems interact and mutually constitute one another” (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 84) (Figure 2). This so-called third-generation activity theory broadens the unit of analysis to relations between multiple interacting activity systems focusing on a partially shared object. (Engeström, 2009, p. 307) Analysis is expanded “both up and down, outward and inward”, the former focusing on interconnected activity systems with their shared objects and the latter tackling “issues of subjectivity, experiencing, personal sense, emotion, embodiment, identity and moral commitment” (Engeström, 2009, p. 308).

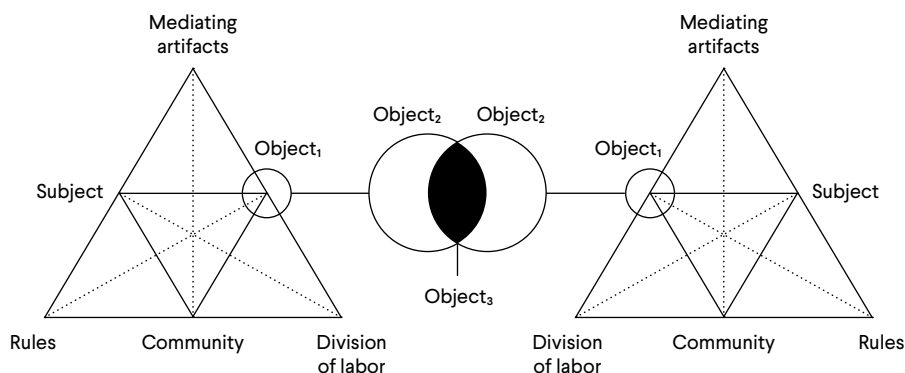


FIGURE 2 – Two interacting activity systems as a minimal model for the third generation of activity theory. After Engeström (2001)

Engeström (2001, pp. 136–137) lists five principles of current activity theory. The prime unit of analysis is the collective object-oriented activity system. Individual and group actions are subordinate units of analysis and can be understood only when interpreted against the background of the entire activity system.

The second principle highlights the multi-voicedness of activity systems. Multiple points of view, traditions and interest are amplified when activity systems interact and network. Networking is both a source of trouble and of innovation, and demands actions of translation and negotiation.

Historicity means that understanding a specific problem or potential requires a historical view. Activity systems take shape and are transformed over lengthy periods of time. Problems and potentials can only be understood in relation to their own history.

Contradictions are sources of change and development, they are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems. Secondary contradictions occur when an old element collides with a new one, which is usually adopted outside of the original collective object-oriented activity system. Such contradictions generate not only disturbances and conflicts but also innovative attempts to change the activity.

An expansive transformation takes place when the object and motive of the activity are re-conceptualized and a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity emerges. A full cycle of expansive transformation may be understood as a collective journey through the zone of proximal development of the activity, the latter denoting the area of learning where the

individual is assisted by another person, either a teacher or a peer. The emphasis is on the socially mediated nature of learning. (Westberry, 2009, p. 18)

### 3.2.3 ACTIVITY THEORY AND THE RESEARCH INTEREST OF THIS STUDY

This study focuses on inward analysis and on acting subjects, with specific experiences and motivations and the formation of embodied knowledge often related to art-making. However, the structural or macro-level aspects are interpreted as interacting with the micro-level investigation.

When I started to look at my study from the activity theory perspective, I first examined the activity systems of individual and institutional. For the first hand-written draft (Figure 3), I listed every aspect worth considering and illustrated that both the context (an academic community, department, faculty or university) and the doctoral student pursuing a doctoral degree can each be considered an activity system in itself. (Beauchamp et al., 2009, p. 267) As already stated said, the challenge for research in art universities is that each of these fields has potentially conflicting aims (Biggs & Karlsson, 2011b, p. 418) that motivate the field's activity.

Then I examined the overall environment within which doctoral studies in art universities are carried out (Figure 4). When we look at this context, the acting subjects are the universities and the art field that form collective institutional entities. Both have social needs or concerns that motivate their activities. The institutional subject is governed by rules and norms, which differ from those of the art field. In universities, explicit academic rules include EU and national legislation, different codes of practices and governmental recommendations and policy documents, but also more implicit and tacit rules such as proper academic conduct, research ethics, writing styles and publication formats. In the artistic community, the rules are more invisible and relate to social conventions and how one is expected to conduct oneself in the specific art field. Artists are expected to create something new, while at the same time being aware of the traditions and conventions of their field of art. (Johansson, 2014, p. 24)

Division of labour indicates how the community organizes itself in order to perform the process of transformation. Again, academic division of labour includes, among others, professors, supervisors, fellow researchers, research teams or groups, librarians, research support personnel, etc. The artistic division of labour comprises production groups and assistants,

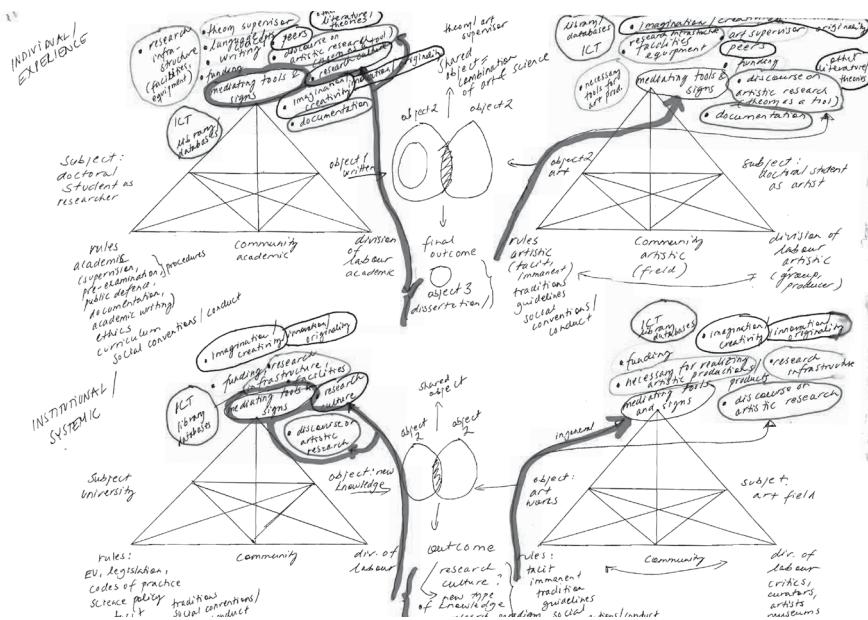


FIGURE 3 – Conceptualizing my research interest with activity theory: the first draft

people responsible for performance and exhibition venues, distribution and marketing of art, and so forth.

Academic institutions are required to produce new knowledge, methods and education based on research. In addition, the activities of universities are also supposed to have a societal significance. The object of activity may also be a new type of research paradigm or even a novel research culture. In art, the object is evidently diverse and multifaceted and is usually carried out independently, where the artist is a member of a particular artistic scene or context. In turn, artistic research takes place within the institutional boundaries of universities. Although the basis of the research lies in art, the art is produced with the intention that it has relevance to the posed research question. The intention is the single most important factor when we evaluate the difference between art and artistic research. (Borgdorff 2012, p. 208) According to Borgdorff (2012, p. 209), the other criteria consist of artistic and academic originality, and the generation of new insights, forms, techniques and experiences. Thus, in artistic research, the object of the activity is shared both by the artistic and the academic institutions.

Figure 4 shows all possible mediational means; those that are more pertinent to academia are on the left and those more likely to be associated with the

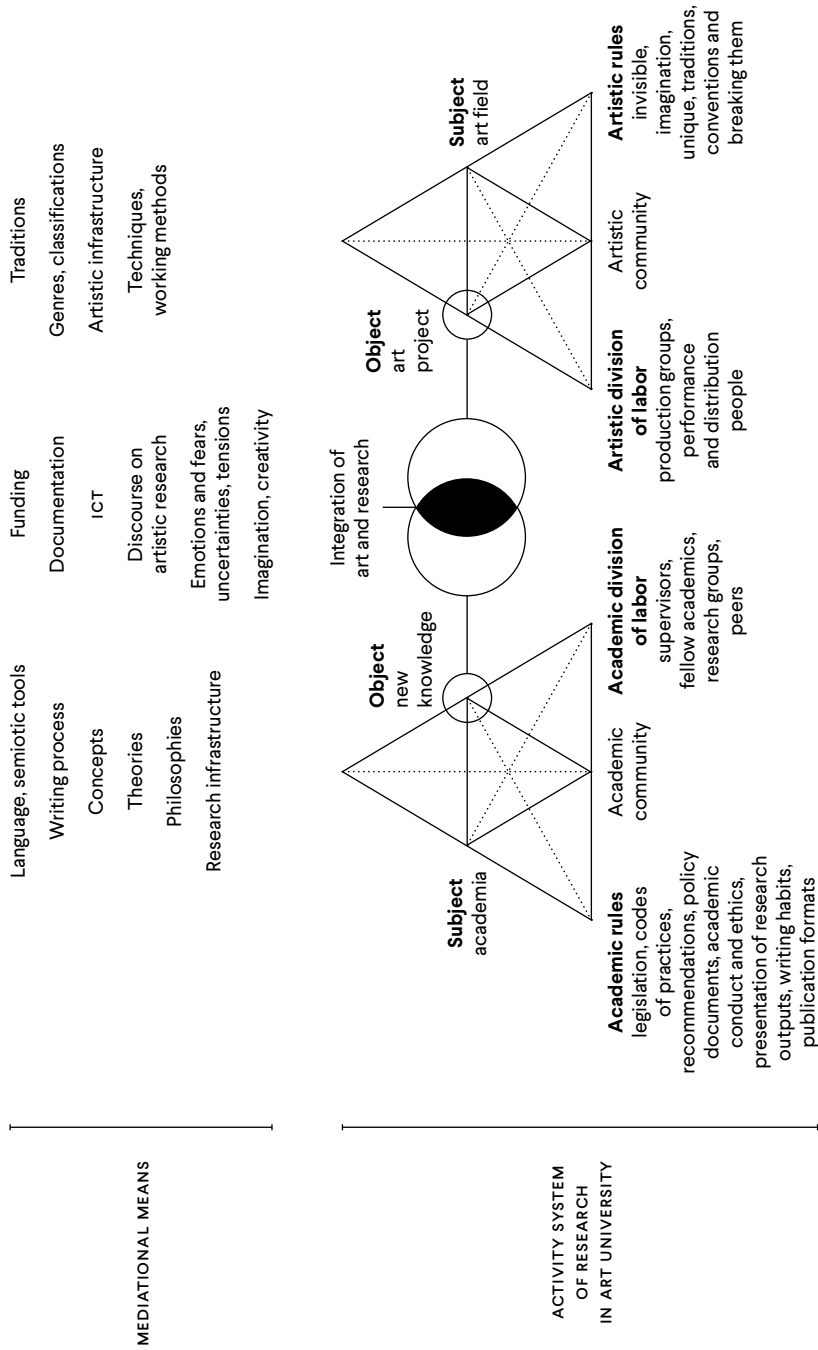


FIGURE 4 – Activity system of research in an art university

art field are on the right. In the middle are those that are more or less common to both. The mediational means are significant not only for institutions but for individual doctoral students. For instance, the current situation, which concerns a discussion on the nature of research and existing conceptual and methodological frameworks, is closely connected to the experience of undertaking a doctoral degree. It constitutes the context for the doctoral work and is the first mediating tool when an artist enters academia; it affects individuals and institutions alike and penetrates both the academic and the artistic fields. When tools are defined as anything that is used to transform an object into an outcome (Kuutti, 1995, p. 27), then mediational means also include psychological instruments, such as imagination and desires and fears commonly associated with personality and subjectivity. (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 62)

What does the theoretical activity figure then look like when applied to the activity system of a single doctoral candidate? The main research interest of this study concerns the subjective conceptions and experiences, where the horizon of meaning and the source of energy come from the object of integration of art with research. As said above, these objects include collectively shared interests and aspirations, and that they are, by nature, evolving, contested, constantly discussed and fragmented, and composed of heterogeneous entities. (Nicolini, 2013, p. 112)

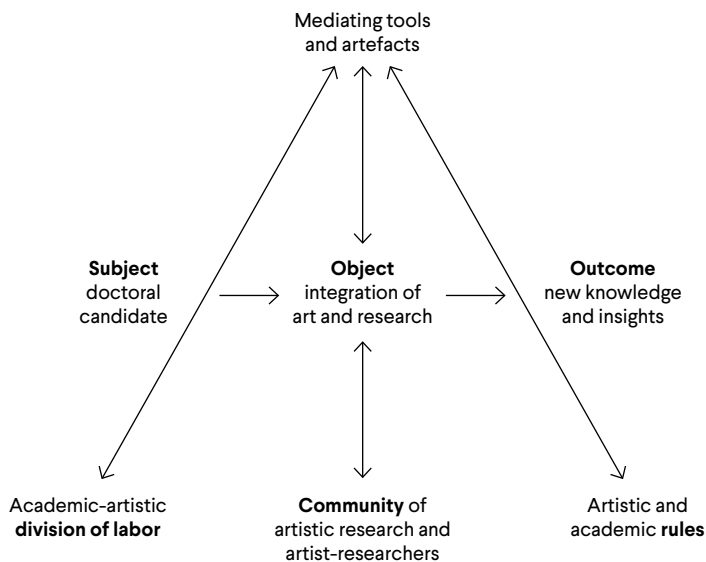


FIGURE 5 – Artistic-academic activity system in doctoral education



Thus, a subject, the doctoral candidate, works with an object using various mediating tools and artefacts in his/her work (Figure 5). With the help of these tools, the object transforms into an outcome. Individual thinking, meaning, sense and emotion are grounded in external social, historical and material relations (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 76); thus he/she acts within a certain community that shares the object and participates in the transformation process. The rules comprise the social rules and cultural norms that influence the subject performing the activity. Organizational structures encompass issues of roles, power structures and allocation of resources. It is only possible to “understand the individual object and motives that give coherence to actions” (Nicolini, 2013, p. 109) by keeping in mind the collective. In other words, different structures and standards direct the formation of the research object of an individual doctoral candidate. (Ludvigsen & Digernes, 2009, p. 251) This is the background where the experiences and perceptions of single doctoral candidates are positioned.

In terms of knowledge production, both institutions and individuals create new types of dialogic and hybridized activity systems when institutional boundaries are transcended. (Yamazumi, 2009, p. 213) In artistic doctorates, the artistic practices are interrogated within the scholarly community, which leads to negotiations on the role of knowledge, in general, and to the reinterpretation of artistic activity as knowledge production, in particular. Also, new types of agents and novel outcomes ensue.

#### 3.2.4 EXPERIENCES AND AGENCY

Next, I began searching the conceptualizations of subjective experience in activity theory writings. It seemed sensible to think about experience and the mind not just as something internal but also as externalized through the mediations of symbols and artefacts. In Vygotsky’s thinking, “the inner world of cognition, emotion, learning and development was premised on the structures and dynamics of the outer world” (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 63).

Although the importance of understanding subjective phenomena has become a central issue and an object of research, especially in studies of human-computer interaction (HCI) where good user *experiences* (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012, p. 49, my italics) are investigated, there is otherwise very little literature on the role of experience. Kaptelinin and Nardi scrutinize the early theories of Rubinstein and Leontjev (pp. 47–50) and maintain that

experience is inseparable from action, it is both a result of and a prerequisite for either internal or external action.

Experience is at the core of phenomenology and Kaptelinin and Nardi (2012, p. 50) argue that activity theory and phenomenology have become closer to one another in recent years. Both tackle subjective experiences and meaning-making but differ in their points of departure. In activity theory, the subject is constituted by social activities that transform both the subject and the world of objects. Subjects act in the world, while the actions are socially contextualized and individually motivated. In phenomenology, the existence of a subject is defined as being in the world, making sense of their existence, and pondering how the world reveals itself to them. The richness of human experience is the starting point of phenomenology and the social context is not necessarily a central issue. In activity theory, human experience is revealed always as being social, mediated and purposeful. (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012, p. 50) From this discussion, it is obvious that a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of experience is yet to be developed.

Stetsenko (2005) has criticized the ways in which CHAT deals with the idea of the active agent and micro-level negotiations. There is a need to expand the role of individuals, since human development and social life are not possible without individual subjects and agents, and the principle of object-orientedness needs to be expanded to address this issue (p. 71). One must keep in mind that there always exists the dialectic between object and subject and the relational interdependence between social and individual. Also, Roth (2009, p. 53) has urged that the theory should take into account the more agentic dimensions of activity, such as identity, emotions, ethics and morality, and claims that activity theory tends to focus on structural and systemic dimensions.

The lack of focus on an acting subject is somewhat surprising since the first component in the activity system “is the individual or subgroup whose agency is chosen as the point of view for the analysis” (Díaz-Kommonen, 2002, p. 73). Díaz-Kommonen examines the activities of artists, designers and anthropologists and sees them as actors and active participants engaging in making an object of art. Thus, within CHAT, it is possible to “ponder about the activity of art while at the same time preserving the unity of historical conditions, such as discursive practices and the context in which the object of art is produced” (p. 95). This context includes a network of people who collaborate to reach the final outcome.

The importance of an interacting subject is further accentuated in the concept of relational agency developed by Edwards (2007, p. 1).

Relational agency shifts the focus from the system to joint action within and across systems and the impact on those who engage in it. It attempts to place some focus on the action of participants in and across systems so that we can recognize how collaboration is accomplished and the capacity for it can be developed. (Edwards 2009, p. 210)

In other words, relational agency means the capacity to offer and ask for support, and to work with others in order to expand the object one is working on. The sense-making and resources of others are examined, recognized and deployed.

### 3.2.5 ROLE OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT

Activity theoretical principles and elements are manifold and the conceptual framework extensive. Added to the equation are the dynamic nature and interrelation between the different nodes. How does the actual research manage to cover all these? To keep the focus of the study on the experiences of doctoral students, I decided to delimit the examination to two aspects of activity theory, namely the mediational means and structures and the object that the doctoral student is working on. Thus, within the scope of this study, not all of the components presented in the triangle are examined. Obviously doctoral education incorporates a number of rules, studies are carried out within certain communities where division of responsibilities affects the formation of an object. In the following pages, I examine in detail those theoretical concepts.

What is the relationship between the doctoral student and the object he/she is working on? As explained above, in activity theory, experiences, actions and activities cannot be separated. Human actions are always purposeful, oriented towards an object. An analysis and examination of a certain activity is intrinsically connected to the identification of an object. Objects shape, direct and organize activities.

Theorists working with activity theory have paid much attention to the concepts of goal, operation, object and outcome. However, the differences and similarities between object and outcome are sometimes difficult to grasp. According to Yamagata-Lynch (2007), the confusion of meanings is

mainly due to translation problems: “Object has been used interchangeably to refer to the goal of an activity, the motives for participating in an activity, and material products that participants try to gain through an activity” (p. 455). Researchers should keep in mind that the object is the reason individuals choose to participate in an activity. (Kaptelinin, 2005, p. 5) Objects are anything but simple or straightforward, they need to be understood as being simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested and emergent. Objects are projects under construction, they define the horizon of possible goals and actions. (Blackler, 2009, p. 27; Engeström, 1999, p. 65)

When we consider artistic doctoral projects, the research objects are realized by imagining, hypothesizing, perceiving and acting on them. Also, objects are something human subjects anticipate, they function as “concerns”, generators and foci of attention. (Engeström, 2009, p. 304) Moreover, objects have dual status, they are simultaneously material and symbolic. (Wells, 2002, p. 45) This activity theoretical conceptualization of object is well suited to the reality of undertaking a doctoral degree. The preliminary research interest, both the conceptual understandings and the ideas for artworks are the elements that, during the doctoral journey, are in a constant state of flux, evolve over time and transform into something else. Artworks can be thought to represent material objects and the written reflection may be perceived as symbolic but in reality both overlap. The transformation of an object into an outcome is what motivates doctoral activity. (Nicolini, 2013, p. 110)

Further, the object that doctoral students work on is complex and may embody various manifestations or forms. When we think about objects in research, changes require negotiation, discussion and debate if a common understanding is to be achieved. Within the so-called negotiation zones, the meaning-making of research is directed and redirected. (Ludvigsen & Digernes, 2009, pp. 251–252) Activity systems are inherently dynamic and therefore the object manifests itself as an *emerging object* that is more or less unknown at the beginning and then changes throughout the research process. Furthermore, an object is multi-voiced, it moves between two domains, the artistic and the academic.

Objects are not only something that individuals pursue, but are part of the system that includes mediating tools, regulations, cultural norms, communities and the division of labour. Without the tools, it is not possible to reach the desired outcome. (Hopwood & Stocks, 2008, p. 192) Once the object is constructed, the subject needs to interact with others, with the relevant community. To understand an object requires careful empirical

research of an activity system, “from several perspectives and ideally through several kinds of data” (Foot, 2002, p. 148).

Interesting parallels between activity theory and writing on artistic research are the concepts of boundary work and boundary object. The latter is conceptualized as an object satisfying the information requirements of several communities (Díaz-Kommonen, 2002, p. 80). The concept was initially developed by Leigh Star (2010, p. 602) and has three distinct features: interpretative flexibility, its material and organizational structure, and the question of scale. They are shared objects and form the boundaries between groups through flexibility and shared structure. The relevance of boundary objects has increased because of changes in work and organization conditions. (p. 603) Boundary objects characterize well the twofold collective context of doctoral work. The object that students in art universities “act toward and with” is typically a boundary object, and it is based on action and is “subject to reflection and local tailoring” (p. 603).

Moreover, the differences between the art field and academia have been conceptualized as boundary work, highlighting the negotiations that are required along boundaries. (Schwab in conversation with Borgdorff, 2012) Boundary work as a concept is attributed to Thomas Gieryn, a sociologist, and refers to situations where an object changes its meaning according to the context in which it is used, whether between academic disciplines or between academia and other external fields. Nevertheless, Schwab notes that the more apt concept is boundary object since the borderline between artists and researchers is becoming more blurred and “research in art has to acknowledge that its objects are fuzzy, preliminary, and contingent on the project at hand” (p. 181).

Biggs and Karlsson’s (2011b) visualization of arts research as a hybrid model, with overlapping circles of arts practice and academic research, describes how these two fields have “merged together to varying degrees” (p. 408). Research always has aims and objectives and the two circles in Figure 6 represent the different levels involved when combining art and research. There is general agreement that the aims in the fields of academic research and professional arts practice are both distinct and separate (p. 409). The upper level of the figure describes the situation of ‘art or research’, where there is no overlap, and the objectives are entirely separate. On the lower level, the aims of the art field and academia correspond fully with each other. This position, ‘art as research’, is common when one argues that all artistic activity is basically research. In the middle, partially overlapping circles

demonstrate that “there is a degree of overlap, but not a complete synonymy, between the aims and objectives of each field” – a view shared today by many writers. Some objectives of the traditional PhD need to be modified so that the aims of research in art universities can be considered part of academia. This process may again result in the ‘new paradigm’ approach recommended by some commentators.

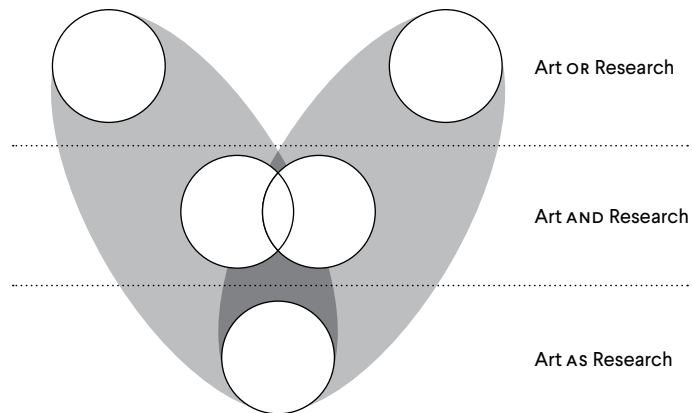


FIGURE 6 – Hybrid models by Biggs & Karlsson (2011b, p. 409)

This discussion on the levels of hybridization resembles the conceptualization of a boundary object presented above. Objects include artworks and artefacts, in addition to, or instead of, the traditional written thesis. Biggs and Karlsson present three cases where boundaries were trespassed, which, in turn, resulted in clashes between the academic and artistic paradigms. (pp. 418–421) Thus, the idea of contradiction is apparent and constantly present when the emergence and development of research activities in art are investigated.

If one tries to connect the activity theoretical conception of object to the discussion of how research in art universities differs from research undertaken in the humanities, it is worthwhile, for example, to take a look at Borgdorff’s (2011, pp. 37–39) conceptual differentiation between the object, the objective and the subject/object relationship in artistic research. First, research *on* the arts has art practice as its object in the broadest sense. It interprets art practices from a distance and is common in the humanities and the social sciences. However, in the research *for* the art model, tools and knowledge of materials needed in the creative processes are produced, as is usually the case in applied research. This instrumental perspective differs

from the immanent or performative perspective, where the subject and object are not separated – there is no distance between the researcher and the practice of art and, hence, no separation between theory and practice. Thus, ideally in art universities, the research object and subject are unified. The entire synthesis of object and subject makes sense but is still an ideal in the current academic landscape of research in art universities, which Borgdorff (2012, pp. 193–194) acknowledges when writing about artworks as hybrid objects, situations or events: “As long as artworks and their concepts remain vague, they generate a productive tension: in reaching out for the unknown, they become tools of research” (p. 194).

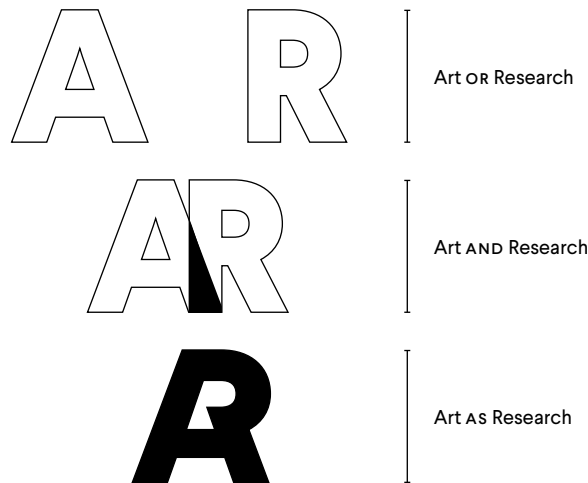


FIGURE 7 – Merging arts practice with academic research. An application from the previous page.

Sannino (2014), who studied Simone de Beauvoir’s career from the activity theoretical perspective, writes that the object the novelist worked on “existed in distant vision” (p. 57). This conception of artworks as objects corresponds to the view that artistic research is open understanding (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 207), we do not know in advance what the objects are. A “researcher is often partly or entirely unaware of what is being sought at the time the research begins” (p. 209). In addition, the notion of goal-orientation is reflected in Borgdorff’s argument of art as research being a purposive act: the production of artistic work also means the generation of insights and contributions to the discipline in question.

### 3.2.6 THE CONCEPT OF MEDIATION

The physical, external and internal tools, signs and mediating artefacts are crucial concepts for this study. When working on the research object and progressing along the doctoral path, students make use of a wide variety of mediational means. Objects move from 'raw material' or 'problem space' to a meaningful shape with the help of external and internal mediating instruments, including both tools and signs. (Engeström, 1999, p. 65) The simplest way to understand the concept of mediation is "the idea that humans always put something else between themselves and their object of work" (Bødker & Andersen, 2005, p. 362). Mediation and artefacts shape practice and a certain activity can exist only as mediated. (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 73; Lektorsky, 2009, p. 84)

The principle of mediation means that "people always interact with, think about, feel, adapt to and transform themselves and the material world around them through social practice that is mediated by artefacts" (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 62). Tools and artefacts may be physical, such as concrete working instruments and technologies or the spatial and temporal properties of their environments, or they may be symbolic, such as signs, language, narrative aspects of discourse or ideologies, and they may even include psychological functions, such as remembering, comparing and learning. (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 62; see also Heikinheimo, 2009, p. 65) Thus, emotional states and ideas can be considered, especially in the context of artistic research, as an essential part of experiential knowledge and experience and, therefore, they can be thought of as being part of the available mediational means.

Mediation is often divided between artefact-mediated action and semiotically mediated interaction. (Wells, 2002, p. 48) One may think that the tools related to academic work, for instance supervision, are mostly semiotic and those connected to realizing research-related artworks are material. However, the division is seldom straightforward and narrative tools and discourse also play a crucial role in artistic production. In other words, material and semiotic actions occur simultaneously or as alternate phases in the same activity. (p. 50) In general, tools in the artistic community include the instruments necessary for successfully realizing artistic productions, the methods employed to execute a particular work. (Díaz-Kommonen, 2002, p. 69) These evidently vary from field to field and in the more technically mediated art forms, such as film, the use of tools requires extensive technical knowledge. Also, the research infrastructure plays a key role in artistic research since it provides those tools that are needed in the construction of art



productions. Whereas Díaz-Kommonen considers an artist's organization of work, that is, whether art is realized independently or as part of the group, to belong to the available mediational means, it could as well be argued that work arrangements have more to do with the division of labour.<sup>24</sup>

Wells (2002, p. 43; 2007, p. 174) theorizes about the role of discourse or dialogue as mediating the subject's action on the object. He stresses the importance of semiotic artefacts, such as accounts, descriptions, narratives and explanations, as mediational means, having either written or spoken form. Discoursing is an emergent process constructed over the course of interaction. Dialogue differs from tool-mediated action because meaning is conveyed. Also, much significant dialogue takes place without a clear material outcome in sight, for example the outcome could be an enriched understanding of the object being worked on. Therefore, dialogue is related to planning or reflecting on action to be or already performed. Via discourse, actions are coordinated and the relationship between actions and intended outcome reflected.

Bødker and Andersen (2005) observe that mediation is heterogeneous and dynamic and that it consists of "webs of mediators, either used simultaneously, connected in chains or organized in levels" (p. 354). This is an apt description of the nature of mediation in the doctoral experience. Students utilize various tools and artefacts and signs and semiotic or discursive mediation within the doctoral processes. Bødker and Andersen (pp. 355–356, 397) talk about multiple mediators, clusters of mediators and a collection of mediators and argue that the distinction between tool and sign mediation merely represents the "theoretical endpoints of a scale" (p. 365).

For the study at hand, the relevant concept is re-mediation, which means situations where new products and ideas are created when an older form of mediation is replaced by a new one. Re-mediation is a process of reflection, where things are reinterpreted, given a new mediation, or re-mediated, which is necessary for changing something, "generating and constructing something new" (Lektorsky, 2009, p. 86). "Not only does every creative action transform something in the outer world, it at the same time forms new features of personality, in other words, forms a subject" (p. 83). According to Bødker and Andersen (2005), re-mediation is a circular process

24 In a similar manner and because of the dynamic nature of activity, it should be noted that supervision can be understood as being part of both the community and the division of labour. However, in this study, it is viewed as comprising one of the sign-mediated tools.

“whereby Mediators turn into Material, Material into Outcomes and Outcomes into Mediators” (p. 393).

### 3.3 Activity theory and the art world – some considerations

Sannino (2014, p. 49) has summarized Vygotsky’s and Leontjev’s views on the act and nature of creation. The drive to create originates in struggles and agonies between the individual and the challenging worlds. Creativity pushes human beings to learn how to achieve what they strive for. Creative production is essentially transformative, it transcends and overcomes the constraints of human life. Leontjev has described the acts of creation as arising from struggles, transcending “the limits of already existing and well-stabilized meanings” (p. 50).

For Engeström (1987, p. 131), science and art are both learning by experiment and “specifically indirect modes of imaginative, experimental practice, aimed at producing alternative worlds”. Both have object and substance, which are constructed in human practice. “In science the substance enters from the object corner and in art from the subject corner. The object is transferred back to productive practice”. The emphasis is on the acting subject and the processual and non-linear nature of the object of art. Both in scientific and artistic activities, one learns to imagine and the learning goes “beyond the given” and takes place “not in the privacy of the individual mind but in public, material objectifications”.

John-Steiner (2000) has scrutinized the collaborations of creative intellectuals and asked how scientists and artists discover and co-construct knowledge. The focus is on the social processes, discovering something new is seen as a joint activity, that is, the dialogic view of creativity is emphasized. The examination of artistic and scientific partnerships is based on Vygotskian ideas of creative activities and their inherently social, cultural and historical nature. The widespread view of individuals as the sole authors of their own lives is replaced by underlining the interdependence of social and individual processes. When writing about artistic practices, she maintains that creative work and confidence in one’s own artistic abilities necessitates support from others, from mentors, family members and friends. Such relationships

contribute to the shared vision and change not only the artist but transform the domain in which the collaborators work. (p. 3–9)

These views on art and creativity have inspired other studies on art practices. It can be observed that CHAT has been quite popular in design research and in the studies of music education. Heikinheimo's (2009) dissertation on music education combined the activity theoretical approach with the pragmatism of the Chicago School, both of which focus on practice and the examination of the relationship between personal actions and the collective division of labour. The study investigates instrumental lessons from teachers' and students' perspectives and asks how musical performances, understanding and learning within musical engagement, the outcome of the activity, are produced. The aim is to better understand and identify the dynamics and tensions of teacher-student work with the help of activity theory tools. The internal context involves specific objects and goals, that is, the day-to-day practical work, whereas artefacts, other people, and specific settings constitute the external, cultural and organizational context. Activity theory provides the basic principles that encompass a broader conceptual framework within which the goal-oriented, socially and culturally influenced practices of humans engaged in common activities are understood. (Heikinheimo, 2009, pp. 62, 82)

Johansson (2012, 2013, 2014) has used activity theory in her research on one-to-one teaching in higher music education. Education is seen "as a culturally and historically grounded activity system consisting of relationships between musicians, instruments, music-making traditions and audiences" (2012, p. 45). Both personal and institutional levels are needed in the development of musical practice. Contradictions occur but rather than appearing as individual conflicts, they act as driving forces for development. In particular, conflicting views on the purpose of education could be articulated and transformed into options through collaborative work. Learning and artistic knowledge development take place in-between an individual's goal-oriented actions and collective object-oriented activity. (Johansson, 2013, pp. 277, 279)

Johansson is also interested in the similarities between the creative artistic work and the cycles of expansive learning. (Johansson, 2014, p. 27) The resemblance is embodied in the concept of agency, a participant's ability and will to change his/her activity system. Artists enter into "a collective activity system, adapt to it and transform it by expanding into new zones of proximal development". At the same time, artistic work is burdened by tradition and an increasing amount of collective knowledge that constantly has to be taken

into account. Applying the terms of internalization, externalization and transformation to art practices, Johansson (2014) notes that the tradition implies the reproduction of the existing culture and innovation and the creation of new artefacts, which in turn enable transformations. A successful artist knows how to balance the two and “in most musical practices, reproductive and innovative aspects coexist” (p. 24).

In Díaz-Kommonen’s (2002, p. 17) study, art is investigated as a form of activity in itself and within the framework of activity theory. She asks how design knowledge is articulated as an academic collaborative endeavour. Models developed by Engeström and Kuutti are used as sighting devices to systematically illustrate and compare three distinct activities of art, design and archaeology, which are distinguished from each other according to the objects that they produce. According to her conceptualization, “the activity of art comprises an interaction with and among many artifacts” (p. 69). An artist uses different instruments and methods to execute a particular work. The work organization varies: he/she may work independently or as part of a group. Moreover, “the object that results from the activity of art can also be the product of an intellectual engagement with discursive practices” (p. 70).

In the activity theoretical perspective, motivation is required when working with the object and in reaching the final outcome. To underscore the high degree of motivation involved in the creation of art objects, Díaz-Kommonen introduces the term “expressive artifact” and notes that “art objects do not merely happen. These are created through the intentions of actors operating with instruments within specific communities (...) As expressive devices, art objects are forms that encapsulate expressions of an emotional state or idea” (p. 89).

Kallinen (2001) has examined the pedagogical approaches of Finnish theatre education using the CHAT framework and the basic concepts of subject, object, mediational means, division of labour, rules, community and expansive learning. He approaches the development of theatre education from the 1930s to 1971 and aims at setting the core problematics of theatre pedagogy into their wider historical context. Kallinen maintains (p. 17) that activity theory offers philosophically, psychologically and pedagogically justified starting points for theatre and education. It also allows researchers to make generalizations about certain historical trajectories that deal with learning processes and their systemic or institutional conditions. (pp. 27–28) Kallinen’s five periods of theatre education are analysed by choosing one of the activity theoretical concepts as a focal point. (pp. 308–318) Finally, he

discusses the parallel activity systems that are essential for the development of theatre education. These consist of theatre pedagogies, artistic experimentation and research, theatre field, cultural and educational administration and trade unions. (pp. 320–323)

Kaptelinin and Nardi (2012, pp. 5–9) have summarized the activity theoretical research undertaken in HCI, whether through theoretical explorations or analyses of previous research. The latter consists of studies that “employ the theory as a theoretical lens, that is, a conceptual tool to help analyze concrete empirical evidence” (p. 5). In design research, Kuutti (2005, p. 6) has, for example, written about the object of design within the CHAT framework, emphasizing that the material artefact cannot be separated from the context and the web of relations within which it is realized. In general, activity theoretical applications in design research concern tools for design and evaluation and supporting people through interactive technologies.

These examples demonstrate that very often CHAT is used as a framework for gaining a systematic understanding of a phenomenon, where both micro and macro-level investigations are required and add to its understanding. It offers several possibilities from expansive learning to the formation of object and outcome, or provides tools for theoretical reframing, conceptual tools and a theoretical lens for empirical studies. (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2012, pp. 5–6)

One of the few texts leaning slightly towards a socio-cultural framework when discussing the development of artistic research is that of Biggs and Büchler (2011, pp. 82–98), where they write about the collision of artistic and academic values that occurred when artistic research activities began. The process was rapid and, therefore, the internal coherence between values and actions was disrupted. A community is defined as a group of individuals sharing common values, conventions, meaningful actions and significant activities within a certain structure. Values include cultural, ontological and epistemological beliefs about the nature of the world. Discontent, disagreement and the ongoing debate about what constitutes research and what are the valid research models stem from the fact that, from the point of view of the academic community, practitioners were not doing research. For the practice community, academization meant that their values are not represented or reflected in academic research.

Biggs and Büchler (2011) are correct in emphasizing meaningful actions and significant activities but their argument on values as stable entities requires a more focused investigation. In activity theory, the community

refers to the participants of an activity system who share the same object. As explained in the previous chapters, the object worked on in art universities is emergent and shared. Furthermore, Engeström (2005) emphasizes that values are not external to the object but are embedded in it, they are inseparable from the motives guiding the activity. Values are indeed societal and shared by communities, not just personal preferences, subjective orientations or mental or discursive constructs. When objects are negotiated, so too are values and motives. Values are not just about what, but also why, for whom and where to. Thus, since activity systems are dynamic, the transformation of an object brings forth change in values. (p. 120)

Therefore, the argument about certain activities reinforcing the aims and values of the community should be reinterpreted so that *all* activities affect the values. Values are not constant but change as the activity changes. In other words, values might be different but the object of the activity is the same; in the case of art universities, it is the production of a new type of knowledge that contains a shared practical object, that is, an artistic element combined with the analytical.

Moreover, according to Biggs and Büchler (2011), “members of a community perform a variety of actions, some arbitrary and some more purposeful” (p. 84). In activity theory, the activity is not arbitrary but always purposeful and motivated, comprising both object and outcome; the object is a problem space at which the activity is directed and which is moulded or transformed into outcomes with the help of the physical and symbolic, external and internal tools.

Biggs and Büchler (2011) discuss the disagreements, collisions, ruptures and stumbling blocks that have occurred when artistic and academic communities were brought together but where their transformational potential was not developed further. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, contradictions and tensions are those forces that induce change and development. They are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems and are necessary for any innovative attempts to change the activity. (Engeström, 2001, pp. 135–137) The view according to which academic conventions and codes and standards of professional creative practice are constant and will remain unchanged should be considered as an anomaly and attention should be focused on how contradictions and tensions act as motivators for change. (p. 133)

Art and research have potentially conflicting aims (Biggs & Karlsson, 2011b, p. 418) and the resulting clashes between artistic and academic

paradigms (p. 421) are transformative, giving rise to new activities. The call for “strategies that aim to bridge the two community values” is highly recommended. The constant interaction between actions and objects significant to the academic community and creative practice should be undertaken and attributed. (Biggs & Büchler, 2011, p. 97) Thus, it may be more beneficial to the development of a new research culture in art universities to focus on actions and activities, that is, carrying out research by experimenting, instead of looking at values.





4 STUDIES ON  
THE DOCTORAL  
EDUCATION  
AND RESEARCH  
EXPERIENCE

## 4.1 Focus on the doctoral experience

The purpose of this chapter is to examine research on doctoral education and to focus on those studies that have dealt with subjective experiences in the doctoral path. Rather than aiming for a critical and comprehensive review, the aim is to present those studies that are closely related to the topic of this study.

Recently, a burgeoning body of literature on the various aspects of doctorates has emerged but not many studies have directly focused on the actual experiences of doctoral students. For instance, Hopwood et al. (2011) indicate that everyday experiences are significant but are rarely investigated and/or acknowledged. Although many aspects are intuitively known, they are quite seldom documented or recognized. (p. 214)

Of the research undertaken in Finland, one of the first was Aittola's (1995) survey on the doctoral study processes, supervision and mentoring relationships in the fields of education, social policy, history, economics, medicine, physics and engineering. Disciplinary norms and organizational structures differ extensively, which affects the ways in which research is undertaken, how doctoral studies are conducted and how they are supervised. Another example is Peura's (2008) dissertation on the biographies and experiences of 23 PhD graduates of the University of Helsinki. Peura emphasized that the academic and everyday lives are intertwined and that the academic community should take into account not only the thesis-writing process but also the doctoral student's broader life situation. Scientific advice is required but financial and mental support in the form of inspiration and encouragement are equally important.

Lahenius (2013) recently examined the experiences of doctoral students of industrial engineering and management at Aalto University, concentrating on the support received from supervisors and peers, as well as on the planning of studies. The need for support is greatest at the early stages of studies. Lahenius emphasizes the relevance of different sources of support and different support mechanisms for part-time students.

The emotional features of the doctoral experience were the topic of Cotterall's (2013) research. In spite of numerous challenges, doctoral processes involve both positive and negative emotions. These "emotion episodes"

(p. 179) are related to the various objects of research, such as writing, which triggered “anger, anxiety and frustration” (p. 179) on the one hand, but joy and pride when the dissertation was finished, on the other. Secondly, positive emotions emerged when interviewees interacted with disciplinary communities in, for instance, conferences while experiences related to departmental working culture were quite negative. The third emotionally laden aspect concerned supervision. Most of the comments were positive, interviewees viewed their supervisors as efficient and friendly, providing feedback and support.

At the University of Helsinki, a national research project on the processes of PhD education focused on the preconditions for successful doctoral processes, namely interaction between student and supervisor, the dynamics of research groups, and a description of the best practices of doctoral training. (Pyhältö et al., 2008, p. 4) This project has continued in a larger multidisciplinary research endeavour investigating learning, teaching and development of academic expertise, as well as educational psychology in higher and further education.

In these studies, the focus has been on the relationship between the doctoral student and his/her learning environment. Stubb (2012) examined the processes of becoming a doctor and the extent to which the learning processes are dependent on the interaction between the student and the scholarly community. Education is understood as a situational, contextual, active and socially mediated process. A successful experience is related to dynamic, congruent and harmonious interaction, which, in turn, increases the feelings of empowerment, well-being and engagement. Veikkaila et al. (2012) reported similar results: “participation in the practices of scholarly communities plays a crucial role in doctoral students’ learning and development as researchers” (p. 155).

Hakkarainen et al. (2013) investigated the personal and collective dimensions of agency in doctoral education, with special emphasis on collective research practices. Again, integrating doctoral students into scholarly communities and practices contributed positively to the doctoral experience. When research problems are shared in relatively strong research communities, doctoral students experience a higher level of well-being. The investigation contains three metaphors of learning and expertise: personal knowledge acquisition, social participation in the disciplinary community, that is, learning the norms, values and practices and the knowledge-creating dimension of learning, and contribution to the creation of academic knowledge.

Stubb et al. (2012) focused on how doctoral students in medicine and the natural and behavioural sciences understood research work. Conceptions of research were categorized as research as a job to do, research as obtaining qualifications, research as a personal journey, and research as making a difference. There were major variations between different sciences but surprisingly little between the natural and behavioural sciences.

## 4.2 Doctorates in art universities

Only a handful of studies have scrutinized the actual experiences of doctoral students in art universities. An unpublished Australian investigation by Simmons et al. (2008) explored the expectations of fine arts students towards their doctorates, how they managed the transition from the art world to the academic community, and what kind of experiences they had concerning supervision. The expectations consisted of the opportunities to advance one's art-making, and the possibility to improve skills, to expand careers and employment, and to participate in the academic community.

The study mostly observed the supervisor's role in managing the process of transition from an artist to a researcher, which was found to be problematic mostly in terms of weakness in writing skills. A good supervisor relieves tensions and brings art and research into a fruitful dialogue. Students eventually realized how theory brought surprise and pleasure to practice and generated new insights and understandings.

The supervisory experiences were analysed under four themes. The first was the ability of student and supervisor to get along with each other, to show mutual respect, and to expect the supervisory relationship to be open and trusting. The second concerned the supervisor's responsibilities and roles, assisting in accessing information on the university guidelines, policies and practices, and giving practical guidance on the management of the research. This relates to balancing independence or autonomy and freedom, in other words, how much to give to and how much to rely on the student. Responsibilities and roles were more related to management tasks than expectations towards scholarly practice. The third thematic category dealt with the changes in the relationship as the work progressed, and the fourth theme outlined problematic relationships that were observed in feedback,

for example administrative problems such as having multiple supervisors, experiencing a lack of continuity or having a supervisor who does not know enough about the student's topic. The conclusions indicate that because of the paradigm shift from the art world to academia students were quite dependent on their supervisors for practical guidance but not for their art although they had to "reinvent themselves as a very different kind of artist" (p. 19).

Allen Collinson (2005) mapped the journey of doctoral students in art and design and depicted the resulting tensions and contradictions. Supervisory practices in theses combining art and theory were also investigated. Furthermore, Hockey and Allen Collinson (2005) scrutinized the challenges concerning the identity of doctoral candidates in art and design. What happens to an identity formed via creative practice when the student enters the academic environment? Anxiety often follows, as artists are skilled in a visual language and not in academic writing. New writing skills have to be developed, causing something of a reality shock as students find themselves in an unfamiliar situation. There is also concern that research might harm or block freeze their practice by breaking the flow or momentum of their creativity.

In addition, Hockey and Allen Collinson (2002) studied the supervision of practice-based doctorates in art and design. They posit that the greatest challenge for a supervisor is to balance art and theory. The supervisor's role was seen as fundamental in encouraging students to conceptualize research as a creative activity. Students were often surprised and pleased to see how theoretical elements enriched art practice. (pp. 346–351)

An intriguing interview study by Wright et al. (2010, p. 465) mapped the conceptions of Australian artist-academics and demonstrated the multitude of approaches to artistic research. Three interrelated views were examined: arts practice as a site of knowledge, the relationship between the roles of artist, researcher and educator, and attitudes of artist-academics in relation to the university system. The debate about the legitimacy of research and different terminologies, such as practice-based, practice-led and practice as research, was investigated.

Of particular interest is the section where views, perceptions, attitudes and experiences of artists-academics were scrutinized. While one interviewee didn't wish to analyse his creative process, for the others art-making and research were truly intertwined. Furthermore, the study attested to the fact that even today the combined roles of an artist-academic "pull against each other and create tensions" (p. 469). When entering academia, artists should

learn new skills and reassess existing ones, in other words, embrace new mediating tools. The interviews reveal that the legitimacy of artistic work inside academia is under consideration – artist-academics still feel compromised and marginalized. The writers conclude that university systems are not fully able to appreciate the research that supports arts practice.

In 2009, the Australian magazine *Text* devoted a special issue to supervisory arrangements in the creative arts. The aim was to amass varied experiences and practices and to encourage further dialogue in the area. (Brien & Williamson, 2009, p. 1) Some of these are discussed in Chapter Six of this dissertation. The main feature of the articles was the reliance on one's own experience as a student, teacher and practitioner, as well as on the collaborative and dialogic working methods in knowledge development. In the spirit of cultural-historical theories, Evans and Gandolfo (2009) believe that no new work or discovery "is ever a result of the purely individual work of a single person" (p. 5) and nothing is achieved in complete isolation. Referring to John-Steiner's notions (see previous chapter) on shared responsibility and dialogic exchange, the authors note that more than one vision is needed in creative practices and collaborations. In supervision, this obviously means that student and supervisor discover, invent and find the way together. The supervisor may know more at the beginning of the process but eventually the student becomes the expert in his/her field, and the "temporary inequality between expert and novice" (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 151) disappears. Stock (2009) reflects on the difficulties of formal supervisory training vis-à-vis the supervision of artistic doctorates. The training does not necessarily prepare supervisors to deal with new forms and modes of knowledge or with the emergent and embodied objects of research.

In the audiovisual field, Lebow (2008, pp. 208–210) mapped students' needs for academic, technical, financial and cultural support and found that the lack of appropriate tools hinders the development of a research culture in this field. Even though students were pleased with the flexibility of studies and satisfied with academic support in general, technical needs and requests were mostly neglected. Support in the form of instruction or access to equipment was inadequate as was the available funding. Even when advice and help from supervisors was usually sufficient and appropriate, the research culture or context in which the art projects were realized was not supportive enough. There is an obvious need to create a more robust research environment where students and academics can work together. Too often projects are completed and considered in isolation.

Kuusi's (2012) study on the recently graduated doctors of music and their views on their education in relation to current employment is a rare example of research that concentrates on problematic points in the doctoral study processes in a Finnish art university. The most criticized was the role of writing in research (whether there should be more or less of it) and the abilities related to writing and undertaking research, such as scientific thinking. Also, supervision was mentioned as a target for development. There was not enough feedback and more support was needed for the doctoral process as a whole. (pp. 16–17)

### 4.3 Doctoral experience in the socio-cultural context

Doctoral students in art universities work at the intersection of the arts and academia. Simmons et al. (2008) maintain that the tension between the familiar and unfamiliar – two conflicting discourses – causes a culture shock, which again increases tensions. Socio-cultural research on doctoral education has emphasized institutional aspects, formal structures and contextual elements that either hamper or advance individual doctoral processes and experiences. Academic environments, disciplinary communities, the webs of relationships between human and material and various social groups are essentially entangled with diverse, rich and complex experiences.

Often invisible but effective contradictions and tensions<sup>25</sup> have been the main focus in socio-cultural research. In new activities, such as teaching development (Hopwood & Stocks, 2008, p. 196), a range of communities, rules, divisions of labour and mediating tools is involved. With the help of activity theory, it is possible to access and describe the complex interactions between groups of people and their institutional settings and the tensions

25 Conceptually, the analysis of contradictions is related to the cycle of expansive learning. (Yamazumi, 2009, p. 214) Contradictions set in motion expansive learning, when individuals face and deal with problems, conflicts and dilemmas. (Sannino, 2014, p. 57) Expansive learning refers to the creation of new concepts and practices for emerging forms and patterns of activity. It requires creativity, which is always present when collective practices are transformed. (Yamazumi, 2009, p. 214)

experienced. Another strand of research has dealt with the potential of the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector for mediating research, especially supervision (McKavanagh et al., 2004) or changes in teaching methods when new ICT tools are introduced. (Murphy & Rodrigues-Manzanares, 2008) The activity theoretical perspective contributed to an understanding of how such practice transforms when the cultural context and the historical underpinnings are revealed, especially by analysing contradictions, tensions and inconsistencies.

Furthermore, Westberry's (2009) dissertation dealt with ICT-mediated learning and the conceptions of participation in three e-learning contexts. The study is positioned within an activity theory perspective and it gives specific emphasis to mediated activity. e-Learning environments are complex and are imbued with various social and historical factors that determine the degree of involvement in them. Activity theory helps us to understand how these settings are shaped by pedagogical, technical, political and cultural factors.

Cummings's (2010) holistic and socio-culturally informed conception of doctoral education builds specifically on Schatzki's theories of practice. Rather than depicting doctoral education "as a particular form of apprenticeship, induction or socialisation" (p. 26), he develops an integrative model where the context is emphasized, as is the multiplicity of activities embodied in doctoral practices today. Analysis, writing, and teaching practices are embedded in relationships, networks, resources and artefacts that intersect and overlap. Doctoral practices are framed by participants such as other doctoral candidates, supervisors, peers, professionals who "appear to be playing highly significant roles periodically and in differing contexts during candidature" (p. 34). Furthermore, academia (departments, committees, graduate schools, etc.) and various communities (governments, industries, professions and the media) determine and influence the doctoral process as does the access to resources, equipment, materials and databases. (pp. 31–34)

Cotterall's (2013) aforementioned research on emotions is also informed by CHAT. Doctoral experience is outlined using the concepts of subject, object, mediational tools, division of labour, rules and community. The PhD student is a subject within the activity system of a certain discipline or department, focusing "on the object of obtaining a doctoral degree" (p. 177). This object is multifaceted such that it comprises a number of interrelated objects, such as writing, but also objects not directly related to the doctorate, for instance finding employment after graduation. The mediating means



consist of individuals, ideas, texts and material artefacts, and the community includes supervisors, peers, and others. Rules are both implicit and explicit and the division of labour describes, for example, the relationship with supervisors. Doctoral students are at the same time members of the different disciplinary communities. It is worthwhile emphasizing that “doctoral students participate simultaneously in multiple activity systems, such as academic departments, disciplinary community and their family” (p. 177).

Last but not least, Larkin (2008) conceptualizes his doctoral path using activity theory and asks whether it “is able to capture the subjective nature of such approach” (p. 1), using, in particular, the elements of rules and division of labour as mediators. The transformation from PhD student to researcher takes place in a research community but is, at the same time, a personal and dynamic experience. Larkin’s systematic approach contains three interrelated and non-linear elements – system 1: qualification for a doctoral degree, system 2: academic career trajectory, and system 3: research community. Within each system, the basic elements of the activity theoretical triangle (subject, object, community, rules and division of labour) are emphasized differently: in the qualification system, the meaning of rules and division of labour are more amplified whereas the career system is more loosely constructed and includes also implicit rules and obviously the community is most prominent in the last system. Larkin depicts various tensions in all three systems and maintains that activity theory assists in depicting the various elements and their interrelationships as well as how they shape the doctoral study process.



5 RESEARCH  
PROBLEMS AND  
RESEARCH DESIGN

## 5.1 The aim of research and research questions

This study sheds light on artists' experiences and perceptions within the academic context, focuses on the characteristics of the doctoral programmes in two Finnish art universities, and explores the context of the doctoral path. Such an examination is important because only a limited number of studies have examined doctoral studies in art universities and even fewer from the perspective of a doctoral student. Artistic research is a burgeoning but still new research area and its future development may benefit from practical knowledge on the processes of doctoral work.

Completing a doctoral degree is demanding in every discipline but the requirements in art universities may be even more challenging, as the research is still evolving and crosses the borders of art and academia. The discussion on the legitimacy of research and doctoral education has taken place on many fronts and has been characterized by disagreements and tensions between practising artists and academics. The role of the artistic project in a dissertation and its contribution to the production of knowledge have been widely debated. (Mäkelä et al., 2011) This forceful discussion, which Bell (2008, p. 171) describes as "raged over status of practice-based research", still lurks behind everyday life in art universities, and it was such tensions and contradictions that inspired me to turn towards activity theory. It offered me a tool with which to approach the contradictory views on research in general and the specific features of doctorates where working at the interface of art and science is built into particular experiences. Thus, I will examine the empirical material through the lens of activity theory, using the concepts of mediation and object as focal points.

The main research question is: "How do artists experience the doctoral study process in two Finnish art universities?". The aim is to present and understand better what being both an artist and a doctoral student means, demonstrate the activities in which he/she engages when working towards the final submission, and consider different mediational means that are utilized during doctoral studies.

The sub-questions guiding the work are:

- What motivates artists to undertake a doctoral degree?
- What distinctive elements are involved in undertaking a doctoral degree at an art university?
- What kind of support is available throughout the doctoral process?
- What is the role of institutions in the doctoral process?
- On an individual level, what is the outcome of the doctoral process?

The research design and questions guiding the inquiry are described below.

In this chapter, I expand on the Methods section of Figure 8 and explain the adopted approach, the collection of empirical material, how interviewees were chosen, and how interview agendas were constructed. There then follows a description of the interview situations and the analytical approach. As depicted in Figure 8, I try to provide answers to the research question through at-home ethnography (Alvesson, 2009), including participant observation, interviews, and published documents regarding higher education policies and university practices.

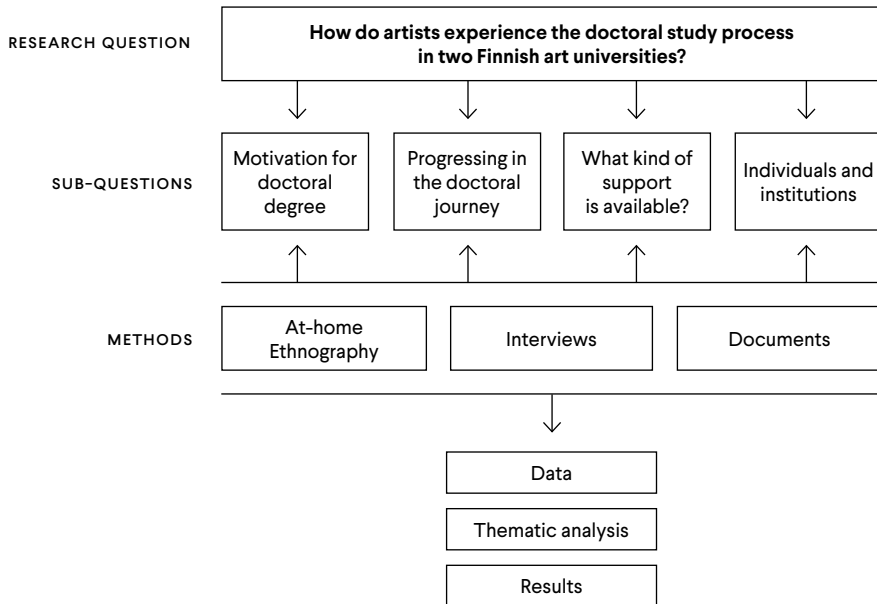


FIGURE 8 – Research questions and research design

## 5.2 At-home ethnography

This is a qualitative study<sup>26</sup>, which is a natural choice for dealing with new and/or under-researched research topics. Qualitative research employs a number of interconnected terms, concepts, assumptions and perspectives that have evolved historically. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define qualitative research as a situated activity consisting of a set of practices that make the world visible, decipher and transform it. Researchers make sense of the world and “interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 4). Empirical material, which describes both routine and problematic moments and meanings, is collected through a wide ranges of practices, such as interviews and observations, cultural texts, artefacts and productions, personal experience and introspection.

Because my research interest stems from the practical knowledge and experience I gained while working as a research coordinator at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, at-home ethnography (Alvesson, 2009<sup>27</sup>) was considered the main method of inquiry. It is an approach where the researcher is familiar with the settings and organization within which his/her research is carried out and has direct access to them. Research is undertaken in his/her home base and the researcher is an active member of the organization “more or less on equal terms with the other participants” (p. 159).

In at-home ethnography, the researcher works in the same environment as he/she is studying, has access to different materials, and uses experiences and knowledge for research purposes. For such a person, being a member of a particular cultural milieu is primary and the research activity is secondary, and takes only a limited period of time. Instead of being a participant observer, in at-home ethnography the more apt term would be an

26 The qualitative approach described in a number of introductory textbooks (for example, Alasuutari, 1993), differs from quantitative research, which uses large samples, quantifies the variables, measures the relationships between them by statistical methods, and aims at the generalizations and verification of findings. In qualitative research, samples are small, the focus is on the examination, interpretation and understanding of certain, usually complex phenomena. The object of the research is a person, group or community and the researcher is interested in processes and how these are connected to their environment. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2004, pp. 140, 161–162).

27 In Alvesson's previous article from 2003, he uses the concept of self-ethnography.

observing participant. It differs from autoethnography where deep personal experiences are the focus. In at-home ethnography, the emphasis is on “the careful documentation and interpretation of social events that the researcher witnesses, and the analysis does not necessarily emphasize the personal meaning or strongly subjective aspects” (ibid. 160). The researcher questions and reinterprets the social settings that he/she is familiar with and tries to create theoretically relevant ideas and comments from the material gathered. Alvesson discusses especially universities and emphasizes that “PhD students combining work and research in regular work organizations have excellent opportunities to do at-home ethnography” (p. 161). His ideas are particularly apt when experiences of doctoral students are examined from within.

In traditional ethnography, an outsider enters the setting, breaks the ice and tries to get to know the community being studied, observes and gathers documentation and artefacts. The researcher aims at understanding and interpreting the perceptions and experiences of the community’s members by taking an empathetic participatory attitude. Eventually, he/she becomes familiar with the social and cultural lives of individuals and their communities and institutions, and presents the perspectives of those interviewed. (Krüger, 2008, p. 1) Alvesson claims that it is a time-consuming method whereas at-home ethnography “offers a good research economy” (Alvesson, 2009, p. 171). At-home ethnography requires self-reflectivity in relation to one’s own practices and a considering of the research targets as “us” rather than “them” (p. 172).

This kind of method reflects my position in the research setting. For over 10 years as a research administrator<sup>28</sup>, I have dealt with the practicalities of doctoral students in film and scenography. My research interest grew from the concerns and problems encountered in my daily work, which called for closer examination. As a member of support services, I had direct access to documentary materials. Also, feedback forms submitted regularly by doctoral students in the film department were part of the additional

28 The main role of research administrators is to act as mediators between professors and doctoral candidates. Hockey & Allen Collinson (2009) summarize the tasks and emphasize their role in “formulating, developing, supporting, monitoring, evaluating and promoting the research and research-degree activity” (p. 142). University support staff not only participate in the bureaucratic processes but manage informal knowledge and diverse tasks that require communicating with academics. The study describes accurately both routine tasks and those that necessitate more “analytic, anticipatory, evaluative, political, presentational and interactional” (p. 156) skills.

background material, as was the 2010 survey conducted by doctoral students at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture. The survey incorporated the experiences of fellow doctoral candidates on diverse issues. One of the duties of the research administration is to use these informal and unpublished surveys when developing doctoral processes and enhancing the quality of study programmes.

In 2009, I was accepted as a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art at Aalto University. That is, my position changed from support person to fellow doctoral candidate. I was already working within the same research culture as those who participated in my study but being a doctoral student myself helped me to further understand respondents' motives and meanings, to identify with their perspective, and to have an empathetic understanding of their work. I personally knew all the doctoral students of film and scenography and was aware of their topics and familiar with their artistic works in which I had participated, mostly when preparing the productions, seeking financing or booking and arranging facilities and equipment. There was no need to use any conscious tactics "to break the ice" or establish rapport with the respondents at Aalto University. My relationship with doctoral students was mainly that of a colleague but not a friend. When I contacted them they knew who I was, which facilitated in getting them to agree to be interviewed. No one refused and most interviewees found the topic of my study interesting and worth exploring. Thus, I agree with Cotterall (2013, p. 178) when she writes: "The fact that the researcher was also a doctoral student helped establish rapport with the participants, despite differences in age and background".

## 5.3 Interviews and documents

Denzin & Lincoln (2008, p. 7) maintain that triangulation is needed in order to "add rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry". This means that several methodological practices, empirical materials and perspectives are combined in order to obtain the divergent textures of reality.

Therefore, observations from the perspective of at-home ethnography are complemented by interviews and documents. The latter was a resource for understanding and explaining the role of institutions in doctoral education. The documents consisted of the requirements of doctoral degrees



outlined in the national legislation, higher education policy documents, reports and memorandums published by the Ministry of Culture and Education, evaluations conducted by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and the Academy of Finland, and European codes and practices outlined, for instance, by the European University Association. Degree regulations and different guidelines regarding doctoral education were closely read. Additionally, and related to the definitions of artistic or practice-based research, guidelines and reports by British, Irish, and Australian research councils and bodies were utilized.

Interviewing appeared as a natural choice in delving into diverse doctoral experiences and in attempting to present an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon. In addition, interviews are one of the most common ways of gathering empirical material in qualitative research. In this study, interviews are seen as active processes and interactions and not merely the neutral tools of data gathering. (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696) Both the interviewer and the interviewee create the interview and the results are mutually negotiated, collaborative and contextually based. Interviews encompass” both conscious and unconscious motives, as well as desires, fears, power and biases. (Scheurich, 1997, p. 73) A semi-structured form of interview, where the questions are open-ended and evolve during the interview, seemed the most appropriate approach.<sup>29</sup>

Establishing a good relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is quite easily achieved in an at-home ethnographic setting. Creating a trusting and confidential relationship is a prerequisite for truthful accounts. (Alasuutari, 1993, pp. 86–87) If the researcher is a member of the same culture and is familiar with the language and the terms used in a specific context, such a rapport is more easily achieved. (Aaltonen, 2006, p. 25; Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 713)

29 Multiple forms of interviewing are generally grouped as structured, semi-structured or unstructured. In the traditional type of structured interviews, the questions are predetermined and repeated in the same order each time. The aim is to minimize variations, to achieve high reliability and objectivity. The researcher directs the interviews and presents the questions in a specific order. (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 717) In semi-structured or focused interviews, the interviewer decides the topic and how to proceed with the questions. The validity or generalizability is not pursued and the researcher is mostly interested in understanding the point of view of those interviewed. The respondents express in their own words views on and definitions of the research phenomenon. (Rantavuo, 2009, p. 37) A reality presented is not supposed to be proven right or wrong but contains the perspectives of the studied subject. (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 714)

Korpiaho (2014), who used at-home ethnography in her inquiry on business education, writes about situations where the interviewer and the interviewee are colleagues. She considers it difficult for two reasons: it is not possible to avoid the issue of subjectivity and the researcher “lives through the joys and hardships” (p. 53), which again shape his/her habitus. One has to be willing and prepared for self-reflection and able to recognize “one’s own situatedness” (p. 54). On the other end of the continuum there is the ability to keep an analytic distance from the studied phenomenon and to focus on the cultural context rather than looking introspectively into happenings around oneself. Thus, at-home ethnography “provides the viewpoint” but the actual aim is a reasonably broad interpretation of the studied phenomenon.

Interviews where prior experiences and relationships play a crucial role have been described as acquaintance interviews (Carton & Copland, 2010, pp. 533–549) where the former symmetrical relationship transforms to an asymmetrical one in the interview situation. This may, in turn, generate uncomfortable feelings due to the institutional role of the researcher.

In this study, a total of 13 interviews were conducted, out of which 10 were chosen for the final analysis. The 10 interviewees were doctoral students in two Finnish art universities, six studying at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture and four at Theatre Academy Helsinki, six were female and four male. Of the three excluded interviews, the first two were considered as experiments since there was a need to chart the terrain and to test the relevance and thematic structure of the interview agenda, and one respondent was omitted because her thesis did not include an artistic project although she had a strong professional artistic background as a starting point for her research.

Since the legislation and degree requirements in doctoral studies of art and design<sup>30</sup> differ slightly from other art universities, I wanted also to include performing arts doctoral students in my study. I was basically aware of the research practicalities at the Theatre Academy and had followed the field but was not a member of this culture, nor did I personally know the students.

Given that the focus of this study is on dissertations that contain artistic projects, it is obvious that doctoral candidates undertaking such degrees should be chosen to be interviewed. The sampling method was purposeful,

30 The Department of Film, Television and Scenography has been part of the University of Art and Design (today Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, in short Aalto ARTS) since its establishment in 1959.

meaning a non-random method where the researcher selects information-rich cases, which are “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The participants were selected based on my own judgment that they were relevant informants for my study. (Rantavuo, 2009, p. 40)

In addition, I wanted to include students from various phases of study. Beginners were excluded for the simple reason that preparing artistic projects takes time and is seldom possible during the first year of the candidature. Of the 10 selected doctoral candidates, only one was starting preparations for their first artistic work, all the others had realized practically all of their projects.

At the Theatre Academy, the procedure used for sampling was snowball or chain sampling, where “the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (Noy, 2007, p. 4). At the end of the first interview, I asked the respondent to recommend fellow students for the subsequent interviews.

At the time of the interviews, two respondents were finalizing their manuscripts for pre-examination, three were at their final stages of research, one at the beginning and the others in the middle. The age range was from 32 to 60 years, the average age being 45.

## 5.4 Outlining the interview agenda

The interview agenda was constructed using my personal experience gained while working with doctoral candidates and the sparse research literature (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2002, 2005; Simmons et al., 2008; Lebow, 2008), which I closely read when drafting the questions guiding the interviews. The third essential source consists of a small-scale exploratory survey from 2007 that I conducted, together with my colleague Pia Sivenius, comprising short narratives written by four doctoral students of film and scenography on their experiences and thoughts on the supervision of artistic projects. (Rinne & Sivenius, 2007)

The lively and ongoing discussion on the epistemological and ontological premises of research in art universities provided a significant background for the interview questions. I was intrigued to discover how doctoral

candidates related to this discussion and how the changing definitions affected their experiences. Distributed material from the second SHARE conference<sup>31</sup> indicated that debated themes include (among others): the role of writing, the role of artefacts and artworks, the relationship with the art world and the professional artists' community outside academia, the relationship with the humanities and/or the sciences, the significance of cultural industries, the Bologna Process, and the validity of doctorates and research.

An important source of information on the central concerns of doctorates in the creative field was documentation from the so-called April Fools seminar, which took place in 2008 at Birkbeck College in London. The event was organized by the AvPhD<sup>32</sup> project, a support network for supervisors and examiners of PhDs in audiovisual media. The transcription of the discussion on supervision and the examination of practice-based audiovisual research provided a rich overview of current challenges in the field.

Accordingly, I chose issues that I felt called for attention. It was also important to keep the interview agenda open so that the interviewees could discuss insights and experiences they found relevant. Thus, the method adopted was that of progressive focusing, issues were dealt with as they arose in conversation (Denicolo, 2004, p. 698). Frequently, interviewees approached important issues indirectly and without being prompted. (Wright et al., 2010, p. 465)

Initially there were about seven to eight questions around which the discussion evolved (see Appendix 1). At the beginning I asked why the respondents decided to undertake a doctoral degree and where they had studied previously. The subsequent questions dealt with support, mainly supervision and peer support and the role of theoretical knowledge and writing. Additionally, the interview agenda contained topics concerning production facilities and identity issues.

31 Retrieved November 4, 2013 from <http://www.sharenetwork.eu/events/share1-helsinki-conference> (Share\_debate\_doctoralstudies.pdf).

32 Retrieved June 12, 2010 from <http://avphd.wordpress.com>.

## 5.5 Conducting the interviews, transcription process and some ethical considerations

Doctoral candidates were contacted on an individual basis by e-mail, explaining the topic of the study and asking if they were willing to participate.

In spring 2010, I conducted three pilot interviews to test the interview agenda. The actual interviews were realized from September 2010 to November 2011 and typically lasted around 45 minutes. The second round of interviews took place in October-November 2011, October 2012 and September 2013. The purpose of these follow-up interviews was to update the previous experiences and to determine if there were some points I had missed earlier. It soon became evident that the second round did not provide much new information, and therefore I decided to conduct only four interviews. The last interview was carried out much later because of the respondent's specific situation. Before each interview, I explained the purpose of the study. In addition, I asked the participants to sign a document giving me permission to use the material for research and I promised to treat confidentially all interview material.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the transcription process, I considered only the relevant content, that is, regarding the non-verbal aspects, I observed and transcribed only the significant pauses and evidence of some emotions, such as laughter but not tones or nuances. Filler words and repetitions have been removed. If the response consists of two comments, the deleted text is indicated by parentheses enclosing an ellipsis. In the interview transcripts, references to the specific features and types of art productions are replaced by a generic expression and are set in square brackets – [artwork] – to avoid any identification of the respondents. The combined length of the interviews is 625 minutes. The average length of the transcript is 13 pages per interview and the data corpus as a whole consists of 166 pages in all (67,131 words). The transcripts were sent to doctoral candidates to be checked immediately after they were completed but only a few remarks or suggestions for modifications were received. Feedback concerned mostly comments related to identification and anonymity; it was suggested that some unclear parts should also be omitted. The interviewees were given

the opportunity to read the penultimate version of the research report and give comments. At this phase, two interviewees asked that some extracts be removed and that others be changed.

To disguise institutions, all names and references to institutional aspects have been removed. Instead of using impersonal codes, I decided to give interviewees fictional names which I chose randomly. Sensitive issues are dealt with only on a general level. Moreover, in a small country like Finland, it would be possible to identify interviewees in the accounts that concern their artworks. I have had to change or not use these comments, or use “creative editing of the data extracts” (Delamont et al., 2000, p. 26) for the sake of confidentiality. For this study, no ethical clearance was necessary and, therefore, special attention was paid to maintaining, as much as possible, the anonymity of the interview transcripts. When starting the interviews, I made an attempt to clarify the existing guidelines and contacted a person who was a member of a group preparing ethical guidelines for the newly established Aalto University. Quite a few structural reorganizations took place at that time and the ethical committee had not yet been formally appointed; it started its work only in the spring of 2011. According to e-mail correspondence with the university’s lawyer, there were no strict guidelines, the clearance was not compulsory but was rather an act of verification. It was naturally necessary if the study addressed respondents’ physical or psychological well-being.<sup>33</sup>

There was a minor difference between Aalto University and Theatre Academy, namely the latter interviews were consistently longer. Although I did background work before the actual interview situation, read web pages and other documents, it was necessary to let the interviewees explain in their own words, for example, the topics and the phase of their research. I was relatively familiar with the interviewees from Aalto and with their research-related artistic projects.

I have included as many extracts as possible to bring the data closer to the reader, to increase the validity, and to enable diverse interpretations. Working with transcriptions helped me to become familiar with the material and to build on the first interpretations. (Nikander, 2010, pp. 433, 435) The cited extracts afford the reader the opportunity to experience the lifeworld

33 Aalto University, Into for Aalto Students, Research Ethics. Retrieved March 24, 2011 from <https://into.aalto.fi/display/endoctoraltaik/Research+Ethics>.

of the respondents and allow the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives. (Törrönen, 2002, p. 43)

In this report, the interview extracts have been translated from Finnish to English, while trying to retain the meaning as closely as possible to the original and to preserve the nuances of the spoken language. The language has been checked by a professional translator. Although I do acknowledge the challenges caused by translation and the recommendations to attach the extracts in their original language (Nikander, 2010, pp. 439–440), I have, however, decided not to include the original Finnish transcripts in this thesis.

## 5.6 Reflections on the interview situation

The interview situations were casual. I presented myself as a research coordinator of film and scenography but also as a fellow doctoral student, occasionally sharing my own experiences. Immediately after the interviews, I felt as if I had been slightly too enthusiastic and had allowed my emotions to affect the interview situation. For instance, I thought that I had to convince the interviewees about my knowledge of the research practices in art and especially of the current debate concerning artistic or practice-based research. In some cases, my enthusiasm caused leading questions and I had trouble keeping myself in check. My eagerness and inability to remain neutral or maintain a distance annoyed me. It seemed to me that I was not consistent enough during the first interviews but, after reviewing the process by double-checking in terms of the topics covered, I decided that there was consistency after all. In one case, I sent a short e-mail afterwards to include one missing question. I can easily relate to Taylor's (2011) views and it helps me to understand the anxieties encountered during and after the interviews.

In retrospect, when writing this, the uncertainty and anxious feelings about the interview situations have evaporated. My position was clearly advantageous, I was allowed to access resources that are not always available in more traditional interviews. The aforementioned sentiments may relate to the fact that, in acquaintance interviews, there may be confusion over one's role, whether to be a friend or a researcher, insider blindness might

complicate the situation as can the contradictory relationship between closeness and distance. (Taylor, 2011, pp. 3, 18) Delamont et al. (2000, p. 18) have noted that studying peers or members of the same professional community, in their case fellow academics, is not straightforward. Difficulties arise from tensions between strangeness and familiarity.

Also, ethical issues may create tension as may the lack of analytic ability. (Taylor, 2011, p. 14) It was difficult for me to maintain a social distance from the interviewees and sometimes my personal beliefs intruded into the interview process or influenced the way respondents replied to questions. For example, I got carried away when respondents talked about certain issues of which I had personal experience and I eagerly explained how the problem could be tackled.

After several months, I listened to the interviews again. My anxiety about not giving enough space to the interviewees was not actually justified. The feeling of exaggerated enthusiasm that I felt immediately after the interviews was actually of no significance. The last round of analysis was quite useful because by listening to some sections that I had earlier bypassed, I gained new insights and ideas. For example, I decided to examine institutional issues in greater detail and to examine the role of the research community in the doctoral experience.

According to Scheurich (1997, pp. 73–74), it is important for the interviewer to reflect on how the interviewees' accounts affect the researcher's thoughts and feelings. Researchers bring a plethora of conscious and unconscious baggage into the interpretative moment, whether during or after the interview situations. Scheurich calls for actions for foregrounding the "indeterminate ambiguity", to state the interviewer's background, for instance training, epistemological inclinations, funding imperatives, conceptual schemes, and social positions such as race and gender (p. 74). I hope that I have "highlighted the baggage" sufficiently in the previous paragraphs to explain my role and position.<sup>34</sup>

34 My background is in sociology, although I have worked all my life in different positions in the Finnish film culture. I have been involved with research activities at art universities for more than 12 years. I am a white female, older than my respondents and inclined to see the field I am working in as a new and exciting opportunity. I have received support for my study from The Education Fund (8 months funding in the form of an Adult Education Allowance) and carried out the research part-time alongside my other duties as a research coordinator.



## 5.7 Thematic analysis

The main analysis method in this study is thematic, where various important themes in the description of the phenomenon under study are identified, analysed and reported. The aim is to describe data in rich detail and interpret various aspects of the research topic. Themes capture either explicit or implicit patterned responses and research-related meanings in the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82; Joffe, 2012, p. 209) According to Boyatzis (1998), “a theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets the aspects of the phenomenon” (p. vii).

King and Horrocks (2010) claim that though “it is impossible to set hard-and-fast rules as to what should be identified as a ‘theme’, there are some guidelines that can be offered” (p. 149). Identifying themes is never the same as finding something within the data. The researcher always makes choices about what to include, and how to interpret the participant’s words. Additionally, the term “theme” implies some degree of repetition, although a unique and powerful individual case may constitute a theme, too. Thirdly, themes must be distinct from each other. A researcher should be able to demonstrate how they are developed and how the final thematic structure was constructed. (p. 152)

I use thematic analysis here following Braun’s and Clarke’s (2006) thinking of thematic analysis as an independent method in qualitative research. In this study, when the main object of interest is *what* interviewees say rather than *how* they say it, the thematic analysis method is best suited. The advantage of thematic analysis is that it is not directly tied to any theoretical framework but, that being the case, every study should carefully clarify its position. Furthermore, the position of a researcher is of central importance and all choices made during the process should be made clear. The thematic analysis is first and foremost flexible and the researcher can determine the themes in a number of ways. Regardless of the chosen approach, the description of the data should be as rich as possible. (Sapleton, 2013, p. 175)

Willig (2013) describes the debate on the premises of thematic analysis as follows:

There is still some debate about whether thematic analysis constitutes a distinct research method (as proposed by Braun and Clarke 2006 and Joffe 2012) or whether it simply describes the process of thematizing data which is part and parcel of a number of other qualitative methods (as argued by Boyatzis 1998 and Ryan and Bernard 2000). Since thematic analysis is a method for recognizing and organizing patterns in qualitative data, it could be argued that some form of thematic analysis is involved in most other methods of qualitative data analysis. Indeed, Holloway and Todres (2003) observe that thematizing meaning is a generic skill for qualitative researchers.

Because there is practically no previous research on the doctoral experience in Finnish art universities, I find it necessary to concentrate on the exact essence of what interviewees say. In other words, the themes are identified on semantic or explicit levels rather than on latent or interpretative levels. The latter examines underlying ideas, conceptualisations, and ideologies, and the development of the themes involves interpretation. Such analysis may overlap with thematic discourse analysis “where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorised as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). I subscribe to Joffe’s (2012, p. 210) view that the analysis of qualitative research themes originates often as a combination of the preconceived categories derived from theories (deductive) and themes originating from the data (inductive), as in the case of this study.

As for the paradigm or basic beliefs and world views informing the qualitative inquiry<sup>35</sup> (Lincoln et al., 2011, pp. 102–106), thematic analysis posits itself between realism and constructionism. It comes closest to critical realism where individual experiential meaning-making is acknowledged but also where the broader social context is observed. Thus, it both reflects reality and theorizes motivations, experiences and meanings in a straightforward way, while acknowledging that those experiences and perspectives are socially produced.

In this study, the collective environment of the doctoral experience is also taken into account, the circle of those who participate in the

35 The paradigms contain questions of ontology (what is the form and nature of reality), epistemology (relationship between knower and what can be known) and methodological assumptions (how the knowledge is obtained). (Lincoln et al., 2011, pp. 98, 100)

construction of reality includes also the systemic level. Therefore, the reality of the doctoral journey is not totally constructed in interaction with the interviewer as is the case in constructionism, but historicity, communities, rules and divisions of labour are also important elements for that experience. These multiple voices come through in the interview data.

Regarding the epistemological stance of activity theory, Engeström (2005, p. 159) notes that this aspect is quite seldom explored. Usually activity theory is thought to represent traditional realism but it may be also seen as a form of constructivism as it emphasizes a sign-mediated interpretation of reality. Moreover, the focus on the acting subjects' potential to create reality refers to constructionism. Engeström (2005, pp. 160–163) argues that activity theory differs from all these epistemologies since they do not take into account the transformative nature of social realities, their histories and collaboration between human beings and artefacts. It should be kept in mind that the possibility to construct reality depends on the subject's place in the configuration of a certain activity system

## 5.8 Process of analysis

In this section, I describe the process of analysis as precisely as possible, while relying on Braun's and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for the phases of thematic analysis. In short, the thematic analysis starts with the identification of that part of the transcript data that helps to address the research problem. Codes, single words or short phrases are described and then clustered into themes. The analysis proceeds with finding linkages between themes.

The first phase, familiarizing oneself with all the aspects, starts during the data collection stage when the researcher looks for meanings, patterns and interests. I made notes and marked ideas when I drew up the preliminary scheme to organize the data into meaningful sets. Thus, the first codes were already created during the interviews. The observations and initial interpretations continued during the transcription, informing the early stages of the analysis.

My research interest focused on supervision and therefore those were the features I identified first. Already during the interviews and especially when transcribing, I realized that the preliminary research subject,

supervision, was not as central as I had supposed when drafting the interview agenda – at least not in art universities. In spite of this important observation I did the first round of close reading by paying attention to the initial research focus and I pondered what aspects of supervisory theories might help to gain more understanding of the specific challenges in art universities. I was not ready to abandon the question that had prompted my investigation. Concentrating solely on supervision narrowed my “analytic field of vision” and I was in danger of ignoring other potentially crucial aspects. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86)

The interview agenda contained other questions that were based on the sparse literature on doctoral studies in art universities. At this stage, I thought that all these questions, insights into everyday experiences, tensions and problems faced during the doctoral journey would somehow relate to supervision. After the initial theme building, I realized that that was not the case. For example, peer support seemed to be as relevant as supervision. Thus, the interview material contained informal everyday activities that are usually taken for granted or even overlooked. (McAlpine et al., 2009, p. 98) Furthermore, the conversation drifted towards methodological issues and the general problems of research in art universities. It was obvious that the interview material contained other issues worth highlighting, for example the ongoing debate on the status of research in art universities with its constant redefinitions seemed to elicit quite interesting commentary.

After repeated reading and immersion in the data, I started to realize that I needed to shift the emphasis and to widen the research interest into a more general understanding of the doctoral experience so that these intriguing aspects could be analysed as part of my study. I could no longer ignore the many elements that emerged from the interview material and contained interesting material on the specific features of doctorates in art universities.

In the meanwhile, I read some theoretical literature and found studies undertaken at the Oxford Learning Institute<sup>36</sup> that used *CHAT* as the theoretical framework. I followed the thinking of McAlpine et al. (2009, p. 97), namely that it is essential to study doctoral activities, whether semi-formal as in supervisory situations or informal interaction with peers and colleagues, to fully understand the doctoral student’s experiences. This view convinced me that I needed to include the insights on everyday experiences into the exploration. The question was reformulated as to how artists undertaking

36 Retrieved October 5, 2014 from <http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk>.

doctoral degrees experience their study period and how this journey is supported.

I familiarized myself more with CHAT and tried to find literature that combined the perspectives of activity theory and research practices in art universities. Also, I realized that within CHAT, it was possible to combine experiential and institutional-level analyses, the interaction between the systemic and the individual. (Hopwood & Stocks, 2008, p. 189) This corresponded well with my initial research interest, to scrutinize doctoral experiences in their wider social context in order to make sense of their complex nature, and to take into account the institutional regulations and communities within which doctoral studies are carried out.

CHAT made it possible to examine contradictions and comment on the twofold collective systems or intersecting communities, that of the academic and the artistic, within which doctoral studies are carried out. Instead of trying to cover all possible connections, I decided to concentrate on those concepts that best served my research interest. The subsequent rounds were carried out focusing on the mediating artefacts, the different tools doctoral candidates depend on during their path towards a doctoral degree. In addition and as explained in Chapter Three, the essential concept was the formation of the research object.

I reconsidered the themes and began to highlight anything in the transcript that might help to explain experiences and perceptions in relation to activity theory. I was also interested in tensions, contradictions and problems faced during the doctoral journey. The thematic map was therefore partly re-conceptualized so that comments or issues signifying aspects of the activity system were identified.

Therefore, rather than looking into the data deductively and based exclusively on activity theory, I used the theory as a lens or framework whereby to scrutinize it from a different angle. I was trying to classify themes within the overall story, that of the doctoral experience. During the subsequent rounds of reading, I continued the analysis by combining and fine-tuning these themes. The analysis aimed at both deepening the preliminary understanding and creating the first draft of discussion of the findings. I collated the extracts for each theme and ensured that they formed a coherent pattern.

The analysis described above was not at all linear but rather a back-and-forth movement between the different stages, as is common in qualitative research. In other words, the analysis moves constantly between the data and conceptual understandings. This non-synchronous process often contains

the overlapping phases of setting and specifying the research problem, selecting the method for data gathering, familiarizing oneself with the data, organizing and defining them, coding, classification of themes, analysis, comparison of themes, building the interpretative schemes and interpreting the findings against theoretical thinking. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86; Ruusuvoori et al., 2010, p. 12)

I started writing, first simple notes and later ideas and schemes, attempting to prepare a kind of analytic narrative or the first short draft for a conference presentation for the AARE (Australian Association for Research in Education) in Melbourne. I agree with Braun's & Clarke's (2006) notion that "writing is an integral part of analysis, and not something that takes place at the end" (p. 86). From early on, I adopted a process writing approach in order to ease any anxieties I might have had regarding the actual writing.

The research report contains many direct interview excerpts. This has been done in the spirit of providing as truthful an image as possible of the gathered material.

Usually research processes are either theory-driven or deductive when the theoretical approach informs the data analysis and there is a logical connection between the hypotheses and theory, or inductive where hypotheses are formed based on empirical data. (Levin-Rozalis, 2004) That is, in inductive analysis, the themes emerge from the data and may be different from those questions that were asked of the respondents. In deductive analysis, the theoretical interest leads the process and the themes are linked to appropriately identified theoretical frameworks for describing certain observed phenomena. (Sapleton, 2013)

The first phases of the process described here may resemble deductive analysis but when the research questions changed the more appropriate description is abductive<sup>37</sup> or theory-bound analysis, an approach that is not based on theory in the strict sense but has connections to it. (Eskola, 2007, pp. 162–164) Abductive reasoning oscillated between inductive and deductive reasoning. In the abductive research strategy, there is a continuous dialogue between theoretical presumptions and the phenomena embedded in empirical data. "Empirical findings and theoretical ideas take turns and complete each other". (Pyhältö et al., 2012) The research is not dependent on

37 The founding father of the abductive logic of research is Charles Sanders Peirce, who emphasized the discovery in science and named the logical process "abduction". Retrieved February 19, 2014 from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce/>.

theory but, rather, on the field examined. The questions arise from the findings, data and phenomena that reveal themselves during the research process. (Levin-Rozalis, 2004, p. 4)

In theory-bound analysis, a researcher works with not just one overarching theory but with several theories, concepts and frames in order to interpret the data and to gain better understanding of the studied phenomenon. New theories are acquired as the study progresses. The data assist in *inventing* hypotheses, and serve as an inspiration for research ideas. (Eskola, 2001, p. 138) In other words, no a priori hypotheses nor presuppositions exist, and there is no advance theorizing. (Levin-Rozalis, 2004, p. 3)

Using this type of approach to devise research may be elaborate and eclectic when it combines differing elements. On the other hand, the method may be rewarding and fruitful and makes it possible to examine the phenomenon from many angles or to divide it into parts and examine each separately. (Eskola, 2001, p. 138) The analysis proceeds from a phenomenon and data but the interpretation is carried out using theories as frames of reference. The data are interpreted from different perspectives, which in this study are activity theory, the discourse on artistic research and studies on doctoral experience and the research on supervision.





6 RESEARCH AND  
MEDIATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the main findings of my research grouped into four themes: motivation, working with the research object, mediating activities, and identity and agency. The first theme denotes the principle of goal orientation when undertaking a doctoral degree. The second relates to those activities or practices doctoral candidates engage in during their doctoral journey. It incorporates various interrelated and non-linear activities and phases, which here constitute six sub-themes. The mediating activities theme, in turn, is divided into two, discursive and material elements. Its roots lie in the activity-theoretical notion on the centrality of mediation and it is understood as including elements that assist students during their study times and contribute to the development of the doctoral process. Supervisors and significant others, such as peers, family members, fellow artists and colleagues, both in research groups and in artistic teams, constitute the first element and infrastructure, funding and diverse institutional rules and regulations the second. The last theme addresses issues of artistic identity and agency.

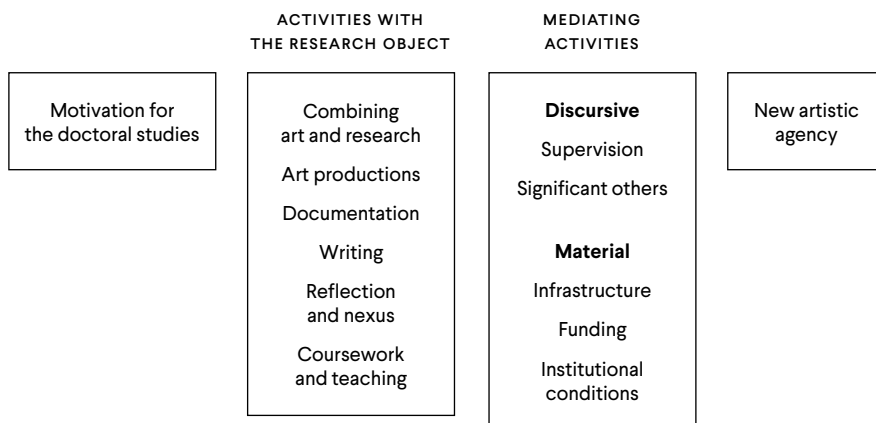


FIGURE 9 – The thematic structure

Using the terms activities and practices quite interchangeably is a conscious choice and based on Nicolini’s (2013) account on practice theories constituting a broad theoretical approach, having both similarities and differences. According to Nicolini “the term activity corresponds to, and partly

clarifies, what other authors (...) would call a social practice” (p. 109). The phrase practice is more prominently used in practice theories explained in Section 2.2.3 which again connects to the discussion of the development of artistic research. In the thematic structure outlined in Figure 9 I use the term activity.<sup>38</sup>

## 6.2 Motivation to embark on the doctoral journey

This chapter provides an answer to the fundamental question of why artists wish to embark on a doctoral journey, what makes them take on this quite challenging pursuit. The opening question in the interviews was what motivated the artists to undertake doctoral studies, which in Finland take ideally four years, but usually are longer. There are no limitations as to how long a student is allowed to study.<sup>39</sup>

In general, pursuing a doctorate requires a lot of effort, commitment, talent and ambition. Each dissertation process is a unique, unforgettable and meaningful experience – a chain of diverse events. (Määttä, 2009, p. 13) It obviously requires interest in the field of study. (Sainio, 2010, p. 9) To achieve something significant, to discover or learn something new and to improve oneself are common reasons for embarking on the doctoral journey. (Bentley, 2006, p. 93)

The interviewees were mostly artists with long careers as professionals, which is quite usual in Finland. For example, the average age of doctoral students at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture was 41 and, at the Theatre Academy, 46 years (in 2015).

Three interviewees in this study continued towards their doctorate

38 Activity theorists differentiate conceptually between operations, actions and activities. The first means routines, the second incorporates the idea of goal-directeness that have meaning only in the context of historically situated activity. At the same time it is acknowledged that “there is inherent dynamic and movement between the levels” (Nicolini, 2013, p. 109).

39 Recently, more attention has been paid to timely completion, and supportive actions have been developed to help students accomplish the four-year limit. (See Niemi et al., 2011)

more or less immediately after completing their Master's degree. These students were encouraged, even urged by their professors, to apply for doctorates either because the topics of their MA theses were of interest or their level of work and their knowledge were promising. Nora completed her MA degree quickly and wished to continue the investigation she had begun. Also, Simo's MA was more conceptual and he wished to do a doctorate that would combine his already gained theoretical knowledge with making artistic productions.

I did my master's very quickly, which is quite rare. (...) I would have liked to study, there were many questions. I was at such a stage that many things had begun to unfold. I was eager to continue, I thought that I had only just got up to speed. (Nora)

[Starting a doctorate] was clearly because of my MA thesis. The professor recommended it and saw possibilities in it. (...) The feedback from my MA thesis encouraged me to develop further some aspects of it. (Maria)

I completed a theoretical MA thesis. (...) I was geared towards research thinking, reading theoretical literature and then our professor encouraged me to continue. (Simo)

Although Maria started her doctoral studies quite soon after graduation, she emphasized her extensive background in different positions and in various art fields prior to starting her MA studies. In her view, the network she had established helped her to move forward in her doctoral studies.

This broad dimension has helped, so that it did not feel as if I was only studying and then starting to do research immediately after. (Maria)

As Kirkkopelto (2007) has remarked, those seeking to complete doctoral studies quite seldom continue straight after completing the MA degree but have usually demonstrated their artistic skills, are experienced, and wish to theorize about their artistic working methods and renew their art via theoretical pondering. This view was evident in Jesse's comment.

After the MA, I wouldn't have anything to say, as an artist. (...) You'll need about five to six years after the MA to test within your art field if these [perspectives] are [relevant].

For some interviewees, the reason for applying was the opportunity to concentrate and scrutinize in depth questions emerging from their professional practice and they felt that the academic environment was the proper place for such analysis and insight. Jesse, Paula and Iris stated that they had reached a point in their careers where those questions called for profound analysis and that analysis required support from others. Paula and Jesse emphasized that crossing personal boundaries and those of their respective art fields were central reasons for embarking on the doctoral journey.

I had hit a point in my artistic work that required deeper [understanding] both for myself and for my art field which was in flux, the boundaries between art fields had started to blur. (Paula)

I had questions I'd been pondering for years and I thought I wanted to write about them. The same questions bothered me again and again (...) and I suddenly realized that I've got a chance to study them further. In a way it was a possibility to expand my knowledge and learning, develop expertise in the topic. (Iris)

I've completed for a long time [artworks] that have theory somehow incorporated into them and had an interest in it. I had reached such a situation where I could no longer concentrate on it and push it forward. (Jesse)

I wished to [do research] so that this thing has some other dimension than just maintaining your profession. (Amos)

Shifting and blurring of the boundaries of the art world and changes in the art professions evoked questions worth investigating. For Jesse, the opportunity to study interesting theoretical ideas in greater depth and to focus on them acted as an impetus to apply for doctoral studies and, for Amos, the motivation came from going beyond mere professional working methods. Breaking down borders between various art fields emerged as, and seemed to be, one of the central concerns for doctoral students in art universities. The

boundaries between art fields are in constant flux and morphing between various art fields generates interest. Doctoral studies offer one way in which to affect and study this change in more detail. It was considered that through research it might be possible to break down these boundaries, to make an impact on the art field and to develop it further.

I asked [my supervisor] about inter-artistic boundaries between art forms. These exist anyhow although we have produced for a long time [projects] that cross boundaries, but still, in research you stumble onto these barriers (...) you can see these in discussions, each art field has its own history of development. (Maria)

I try to find transformations and articulate them in my activities. How my own works reflect that change, how to do things differently and nevertheless how to do them in relation to traditions. (Amos)

Evidently, for many respondents, there was no single reason but many simultaneous motivating factors for applying for doctoral studies. For example, international developments and experiences worked as catalysts so that being exposed to foreign and alternative artistic cultures, an awareness of what colleagues were doing abroad and being active in international organizations acted as reasons for applying.

I realized that they are much more advanced in these things. I read foreign papers and articles, looked and listened and started to figure out what they do 'out there.' (Paula)

I was away from Finland and exposed myself to a different artistic culture. (...) And made contacts with local people. (Simo)

The production culture in the audiovisual and performing arts does not allow sufficient opportunities to critically review the conditions and forms of practical creative work. The tried and tested modes are repeated and no room is left for the development or understanding of new ones. In other words, experimentation is rarely possible in professional, full-scale productions where timetables are fixed and budgets tight. This was evident in Iris's and Erik's comments.

My art field, in the production process, is usually about doing in such a phase, doing, doing, and the questions arising in the production process, you have no time to really tackle them. (Iris)

To do [art], it is such a struggle. (Erik)

The above comments support Arlander's (2011, p. 320) view that research in an art university provides an opportunity for challenging experimentation that is not possible within ordinary practice. Instead of knowledge production "most artists turn to research either because they disapprove of existing artistic practices, have a vision or dream or wish to experiment and play" (p. 321).

Individual reasons for applying, and which are worth mentioning, include the current societal debate about art contributing to the development of innovations. (Hautamäki, 2013) Amos came across a topic when he followed a discussion going on in society, reflected upon this discussion in terms of his art field, and wished to discover what lay behind it. Erik was inspired by the possibilities of practice-based research and decided to apply instead of concentrating on the more traditional research, which was the only option in his home country.

I found an interesting topic and it crystallized. Doing a doctoral degree seemed the most sensible way to approach it. (Amos)

I didn't like the [classical academic] approach but wanted to do both research and [artworks] and came to know about the programme here. Somehow I thought that I would have more freedom as a researcher within this structure. (...). Practice-based research is really important in terms of methodology. (Erik)

For some, the doctorate offered a welcome break from their daily artistic work, an opportunity to clarify thoughts and concentrate on a single subject. Emma decided to orient her efforts to academic study because her artistic projects did not manage to receive funding. She admitted to not having a clear idea of what doctoral studies consist of or of having a specific intellectual goal and considered her starting points quite feeble.

[The reasons] were quite weak, I had nothing else going on and my [artworks] didn't receive [funding]. I didn't quite know what a big project it is. (...) It was an option and I wanted to give it a try. (Emma)

She stated clearly that starting doctoral studies was pretty much incidental. Despite a lack of serious intent at the beginning, she both completed her extensive artistic project and published the written component with distinction. Thus, focusing on research eventually contributed to her marked headway both in academia and in her professional field.

Her response is similar to that found in Hockey's study (2003, pp. 86–87) where a minority of informants revealed that their motive for undertaking a research degree had not so much to do with pursuing research or acquiring a qualification but rather to working with their practice and, at the same time, having guaranteed funding, which in difficult financial times is an understandable choice. In addition, universities can offer attractive resources, materials and facilities for the development of artistic projects.

One intriguing aspect among the reasons for applying was the already existing approach of interweaving art-making with a theoretical interest. As Emma's example demonstrates, integration of research methods and scientific knowledge was not very evident when she started her studies. There were, however, three interviewees whose working methods involved a clear theoretical interest integrated into their artistic work. Jesse even defined himself via his theoretical approach.

My research question is quite theoretical, what theory means within my artistic practice. I've long carried out [artistic work] and theory has always been part of it, a topic of interest. (...) I wanted to experiment, to expand at least my own horizons. (Jesse)

Rosa pointed out that her artistic working methods had been research oriented from the start. Undertaking a doctoral degree was a very natural choice.

My approach has always comprised a research angle. (...) This [doing a doctorate] offers a context for what I do, it is very natural to me. (Rosa)

Furthermore, she noted that art-making has changed and the emergence of artistic research within academia is a manifestation of this change.



Part of the field in making art has changed so that artistic research is only one expression of it. (...) That kind of word [research] has been added. (Rosa)

Her view resonates well with Busch (2009, p. 1) who argues that “contemporary art practice is now so highly saturated with theoretical knowledge that it is becoming a research practice in and of itself”. She refers to, for example, colour theory, optics and geometry, all of which have influenced forms of art presentation and content. In addition, the contribution of psychoanalysis to surrealist painting or phenomenology to minimalist art or linguistics to conceptual art demonstrates that theory has found its way more or less explicitly into works of art. Blurring the lines between art and theory is enhanced by restructuring art academies and establishing more artistic research projects. Arlander (2011) also points out that research as exploration, investigation, trial and error has been a component of artistic work, and artistic research can therefore be thought to be “the latest trend in contemporary art” (p. 320).

These responses may be reflected within the recent study on Australian fine arts master’s and doctoral students, where Simmons et al. (2008, pp. 6–12) asked about expectations concerning academic degrees. Although the explicit reasons for doing a doctorate and expectations concerning it are two different things, they share some common features. Quite a few interviewees of this study expected to advance their art-making, to explore new directions and to inject new rigour into their art. It was duly noted that theory could bring surprise and pleasure to practice and generate new insight and understanding. (p. 8) The other expectations related to skills improvement, career and employment or participation in the academic community.

To advance one’s art-making is quite an obvious reason for a practice-based doctorate. However, the second theme in the Simmons et al. study, the opportunity to improve scholarly skills, meaning the possibility to gain success as an artist or to prepare for independent practice, elicited strong expectations in Australia. The reason for the absence of the mention of skills improvement in the current study could be explained by the fact mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: those embarking on doctorates are usually experienced artists with successful careers.

Bell (2008, p. 176) discusses the possibilities an artistic doctorate offers and identifies four types of PhD candidates in the audiovisual field: firstly, professional artists wishing to advance an understanding of their profession

by making artistic work, documenting, reflecting on the practice critically and/or deconstructing the conventions of their field; secondly, those wishing to continue their bachelor and master's studies, thus integrating theory and practice; thirdly, candidates with a background in theoretical studies who wish to acquire creative skills and, finally, those who are trained artists wishing to reframe their practice with critical discourse as a strategy for renewing it. My interviews verify that that the development of one's art was a clear incentive for doctoral studies, as was the desire to continue on from undergraduate studies where art and conceptual thinking had become unified. As the empirical material of this study comprised only professional artists, the third category is obviously absent but Bell's final conceptions were again very much present.

Thus, doctorates may offer an opportunity to rethink art education, to advance cooperation between art and academia, and to create "new kinds of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary configurations" (Elkins, 2009, p. 279). On a personal level, for artists, the usefulness of the PhD depends on how deeply he/she is willing to delve into theoretical thinking. But, it is also claimed that a PhD degree prolongs study at a time when an artist "should be out finding his/her way in the world" (p. 279).

Compared with the finding of Simmons et al. (2008), the interviews did not reveal any conscious career planning or a wish to advance a future career in academia, which relates mostly to the fact that, in Finland, both the artistic and the academic communities are quite small and often cooperate closely. As Lebow (2008) notes, "even in this highly professionalized world, there is absolutely no demand upon practitioners within the film/video industry to hold a PhD" (p. 207), whereas usually a doctoral degree is a requirement if a person wishes to pursue an academic career. Nor were there any references to improving skills as an artist or a wish to be part of the academic community. Many doctoral candidates participate in the teaching activities in their respective departments with or without formal qualifications. Thus, a doctoral degree does not guarantee a certain position

in Finnish art universities since the career opportunities usually depend on artistic qualifications.<sup>40</sup>

Although the doctorate obviously adds to an understanding of the relationship between art and theory, a doctor of art is not necessarily a more competent artist than a master of art, nor is he/she a better applicant for a vacant post than a fellow artist without a degree. (Kirkkopelto, 2007) According to Kaila (2012, p. 7), artists apply for doctoral studies for four reasons. Some wish to obtain qualifications for working life and others seek collective activities that differ from those in the art world. For some, doctoral studies offer resources, such as scholarships, for their artistic careers. For others, a doctorate presents an opportunity to develop artistic, research-related or pedagogical competencies. Kaila notes that only the last motive is valid although doctoral studies provide advantages when applying for projects or employment. Mäki's (2014) view emphasizes the first, the contribution an artist makes to his/her own art or to the art field in general. Via research, art becomes better, and one can enjoy and explain it more and change it.

## 6.3 Activities with the research object

### 6.3.1 INTRODUCTION

The second theme was constructed around those aspects that concerned the different activities to be carried out in order to progress on the doctoral journey. These sub-themes deal with the issues of combining theory and art, the scope of art productions, documentation, reflection, the balance of art and research, writing and, finally, teaching. As noted earlier, not all

40 Only in polytechnics or applied science universities providing BA-level education are principal lecturers required to hold a licentiate or doctoral degree. In Finnish higher education, there are two complementary sectors, universities and polytechnics. While the mission of universities is to concentrate on research and education based on it, polytechnics "train professionals in response to labour market needs and conduct R&D which supports instruction and promotes regional development in particular". Retrieved May 3, 2014 from <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/ammattikorkeakoulutus/?lang=en>.

phases of the doctoral process are included in my research, only those that emerged in the interviews.

From the activity theoretical point of view, this thematic category signifies the construction of a particular object, in the case of this study, research. Objects are sense-makers, they give meaning to the subject, a doctoral candidate, and motivate participation in an activity undertaken as part of doctoral studies. What makes this object specific in an art university context is that it is constituted from the features of both the art field and academia, and the final outcome is expected to form a coherent whole. In this outcome, in turn, the systemic intentions, expectations of a certain field of research, are manifested. (Westberry, 2009, p. 63) Therefore, in particular, theoretical stances and starting points also act as mediational means and tools within the doctoral journey. In other words, the theory and methodology of artistic research have a *dual status*, are part of the mediational means and tools within the doctoral journey but at the same time are essential components in doctoral practices. As part of the mediational activities, these “tools” carry with them a particular culture, that is, they transmit the existing knowledge of the research culture. (Kaptelinin et al., 1995, p. 192)

The previous section revealed that the interviewees embark on a doctoral journey for a variety of reasons. The interviewees described a mosaic of approaches, which reflects the current situation in artistic research, where the relevance of earlier research models and conceptual definitions is limited. Each new research endeavour is truly unique because the practice undertaken within it cannot be matched with any previous study. Thus, although research models and conceptual frameworks exist, the case-by-case nature of research makes the doctoral journey particularly challenging. (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 27) Each doctoral student needs to find his/her own way to approach the research question.

### 6.3.2 VERSATILE WAYS OF COMBINING ART AND RESEARCH

The interviewees were well aware of the evolving nature of artistic research and acknowledged the challenges of multifaceted definitions, which continue to be contested and used interchangeably and seek legitimacy. (Paltridge et al., 2011, p. 243) Although the research field has become more precise during the last two decades, the ongoing debate as to what actually constitutes research in art universities seems to cause pressures and

uncertainties. The challenge motivates and inspires but seems to also pose unanswered questions.

When we define what is practice-based or artistic research or however or in what way you wish to put the definitions, it is so diverse, not one clear answer. (Paula)

Practice-based [research] or however you translate it is not the same as artistic... or I don't know. (...) It is neither well-defined nor is there a single answer. (Jesse)

How the artistic part [is], is it practice-led or practice-based or performance as practice... (Simo)

The lack of a final consensus on the terminology of research and doctoral work is not necessarily negative since no single conception of scientific research has been reached, and therefore one cannot expect artistic research to be defined unequivocally. The plurality of concepts and understanding may positively affect the development of the field and provides an opportunity to keep open, for example, the relationship between creative practice and scholarly text. (Kjørup, 2011, p. 24; Ravelli et al., 2013, p. 417)

One of the first attempts to have a clear division between practice-based and practice-led research was outlined by Candy (2006). The former entails research where the creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, that is, new knowledge is gained by means of practice. This contribution is demonstrated through the creative outcome and, and, thereby, it requires the inclusion of a creative work. In practice-led research, the primary focus is to advance knowledge about and within practice. New knowledge that has an operational significance for the practice is described only in written form.

Rather than naming or defining a certain theoretical framework, some interviewees portrayed their theoretical approaches as participation in the current discussion and exploration of what artistic research is as a methodology and how it relates to other research methodologies. Again, the question arose as to whether artistic research should be uniform because other methodological approaches, such as qualitative research, contain many disparities. The interviews indicated a firm wish to engage in the development of the research field and acknowledged that diverse practices exist.

I try to think what artistic research is as its own methodology, there is so much written about it. I see it as linked to the existing research methodologies that it is not entirely new as such, I try to expand this. (Nora)

I haven't got a comprehensive theoretical framework. I can primarily say that I'm attached to artistic research, a method where there are several paths. (Simo)

What artistic research is in general, that I am pondering. (Rosa)

Another way to approach the question of theoretical frameworks is to choose a certain individual concept and to work with it both in written form and when realizing artistic productions. Often these concepts originate from certain philosophical frameworks.

The theoretical framework is a tool in concept formation. (Simo)

My topic is quite philosophical and ambitious. (...) I wish to choose a certain concept and stick to it and study what the concepts could probably mean in terms of making [art]. That [concept] emerged from a totally different context and I grabbed it and started to work with it. (Iris)

I've developed concepts and philosophy has always been a discussion partner for me. (Rosa)

It appears that many practitioners feel a closeness to philosophical ideas and these are in line with their way of working in artistic processes. (Grierson, 2012, p. 70)

As is obvious from the above, the interviewees produced a wide range of responses regarding their use of theory in research. The same applies to their familiarity with theoretical concepts in general. The most confident were those who had an existing theoretical orientation before starting their doctorates. Their interest in theory was strong and long-standing and those interviewees demonstrated a familiarity with certain philosophical discussions. Some had studied the social sciences or humanities, others had acquired theoretical knowledge independently. For those, and also others,

theory and practice were considered to be truly intertwined, and theory's "presence" in art was described as natural and working with theoretical issues meaningful. The following extracts exemplify these orientations.

I think that in my work practice and theory are very much intertwined. (...) I would not be a researcher without my artistic work, which is very much based on thinking. (...) For me it is a very meaningful way to do things. (Nora)

[Theory and art] are for me very naturally interlocked, because this is a long-standing development, both are indispensable for me. (Rosa)

Not every interviewee had an equally uncomplicated relationship with theory, simply because instruction in art universities usually concentrates on artistic training and includes few theoretical courses and does not exactly prepare one for a research career. If a student has not undertaken prior academic studies, the lack of theoretical insights might hamper his/her advancement along the doctoral process. An artist can, and often will, utilize theory and philosophy as a source of inspiration instead of engaging fully in theoretical discussions or theory building. Many interviewees noted the distinction and pointed out that an artist's knowledge differs from that of theoreticians or philosophers. The demarcation is evident in the following quotes:

I felt I was cheating when I was not as familiar as a theoretician. Then I learned that I don't need to read each book but only those that are relevant. (Emma)

But I'm not a philosopher and I'm shy and afraid that I mess up with the conceptual framework and disentangle the elements from a proper discourse. (Iris)

Whose thoughts are you thinking, you are not a philosopher, or a social science theorist but an artist who uses theory. (Jesse)

The process of acquiring or developing a theoretical or conceptual understanding for a doctoral project is not necessarily an easy task for an artist. Obviously, artists do not possess similar levels of theoretical knowledge as do their colleagues in other universities. For Jesse, it was important

that the connection with theory was not forced but organic, woven into his practice in a meaningful way. At the same time, he acknowledged that such knowledge might be limited.

I realize that I haven't got those resources, to do [the research] like a philosopher. (Jesse)

Although working with theory was considered natural, the relationship between theory and art-making was not easy to articulate, even for those who thought about it as an inherent way of working.

This question is often asked but I cannot say. (...) They [art and theory] are just easily interlocked. (...) I haven't discovered any good metaphors for it, but eruptions and reshaping often occur there. (Rosa)

As her comment indicates, in some instances metaphoric thinking was thought to be helpful when figuring out those versatile relationships. With Maria and Rosa, we discussed metaphors and Maria found it helpful to approach the integration with the help of such concepts as strands in braids or a DNA helix.<sup>41</sup>

Those kinds of things [metaphors] would work for me. How to weave [these together], yes, braid is good, it has a lot of hairs and strands. (Maria)

Despite difficulties in defining in advance the exact relationship between theory and practice or the ways in which knowledge is acquired, the interviewees acknowledged many opportunities for knowledge production and observed the possibilities for new forms of research growing out of their experience.

There are great variations in thinking about how artwork is connected with the construction of knowledge; is it material that will be examined afterwards as in in qualitative research or what is the relationship between researcher and artist, how his or her participation in the

41 Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 156) suggest that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. New metaphors create new realities.



[artwork] also produces knowledge. And third, what knowledge does the [artwork] itself contain? This is also a topic of debate. (Simo)

[Via the art production] I will definitely gain knowledge. (...) But it is particularly hard to define it beforehand. (Maria)

Every individual research project makes a contribution to “epistemological spadework” as Bell (2006, p. 95) eloquently points out. Being a pioneer in one’s own field means that each finished dissertation is instrumental in the development of the research culture in the respective field. The interviewees acknowledged the challenge of contributing to this spadework and knew that the forms it takes vary considerably.

### 6.3.3 THE SCOPE OF ART PRODUCTION

The topic of the practicalities of artistic production was not included in the original interview but was one of those that arose spontaneously and elicited quite a few comments.<sup>42</sup> We ended up talking about the extent and workload of artistic work, which was usually described as being far too broad, expanding, a huge task to be taken care of.

It was an absurd idea because the workload was really double compared with [ordinary] dissertations. They [the productions] comprise a huge amount of production work. (Rosa)

The interviews reveal that doctoral students may realize several artworks simultaneously.

There is a lot of work. (...) The idea is that these artworks I realize may swap over, they are tested in different ways and developed further all the time. [The second artwork] runs in parallel with this one. (...) But I have a strong feeling that I need to do these, I push these through, it feels important. (...) If I have no time to go through these, it [the research] will not be complete. (Maria)

42 In this study, no references to the contents of research-related artworks are made for the sake of anonymity.

Some of the productions even overlapped [timewise], I prepared others while realizing one and trying to write more. (Simo)

Again, the question of the number of artworks is not as simple as it seems at first glance. Sometimes the research question or the method of undertaking the research requires many works or a series of projects. The number of artistic productions was thought to be imperative to answer the research question, which was hence seen as justification for the amount of time the projects required. The interviewees found it necessary to complete those artworks included in their research endeavours and found that the research really requires the artist to complete such a large number of artworks.

[The artistic part of my thesis] is way too extensive (...) but in a way it has been my method, to develop things. (...) A huge amount of time has been spent just setting up the productions. (Simo)

I could have reduced [the number of productions] but I didn't want to do it because it would have undermined the basis of it [research plan]. Making many has in a certain way been my method, sometimes you just need several of them. (...) Otherwise I cannot do research. (Rosa)

I actually didn't realize how large the body of work was. (Emma)

Further, one interviewee noted that when the research activities began, many students felt the need to realize many productions as a way to legitimize their activities. Artworks seemed to act as proof of professional competence, the productions often showy in addition to being broad ranging.

[Earlier] it was required that a dissertation would include so many artistic projects. (...) I've personally adopted this need to prove myself, I realize it now. (...) The works were supposed to be professionally competent and spectacular in order to avoid the idea that you are an amateur. (Simo)

After the restructuring of research at the Theatre Academy, the number of practical components is today limited to three. Kirkkopelto (2011) notes that "according to our experience, the first ones are almost without exception

quite ambiguous and too complex, close to the initial artistic practice of the researcher, like individual artworks” (p. 3).

The scope of artistic doctorates has been recognized by researchers and concerned voices have been raised. For instance, Nelson (2008, p. 41) considers that the extensive literature review may in itself constitute a comprehensive study although it should be only one aspect of framing the practice. Kroll (2009, pp. 7–8, 12) maintains that the scope is a real challenge and needs to be constantly refocused because doctoral candidates in the arts wind up completing work for two theses, a major creative project and a written component – the dissertation – which demonstrates an understanding of the relevant processes and articulates the cultural and/or historical context of the work. Some writers, such as Biggs and Karlsson (2011b, pp. 414, 417), see the scope as a question of legitimacy and the workload of “double” doctorates caused by the lack of aims and objectives, especially in Finland. Both art and research have to be satisfied equally and there is no real consensus on the hybrid model. The authors blame those supervisors who do not place enough reliance on the weight of the artistic work and require a comprehensive written component. In addition to legitimacy, credibility issues also have been at stake. According to James (2003, p. 3) it was “critical to establish credibility for the creative arts disciplines” and the emerging field would need to demonstrate the rigour of a traditional PhD. Because of the initial resistance to research in art universities, extensive art productions acted as evidence of the validity of artistic research. In his polemic article, Professor Murtomäki, from the Sibelius Academy (2010, p. 4), claims that dissertations are too extensive and comprise scientifically appropriate written components (alongside the high quality artworks) only because of habit; this kind of practice has somehow taken root in Finnish art universities. He urges rethinking of the written component so that it no longer constitutes a burdening and pseudo-scientific “push-up” that petrifies the doctoral process.

There is still one additional burden, namely the practical production responsibilities of research-related artistic work. The interviewees discussed in great detail the extra workload surrounding their doctoral work. Doctoral candidates usually have to produce their own projects. Production tasks often include raising funding, compiling budgets and booking facilities and equipment. In other words, doctoral candidates also take care of the roles and responsibilities that, outside of academia, are handled by professional producers. Therefore, the workload is not only doubled but actually tripled and this causes tensions between the roles of artist, researcher and producer.

One interviewee agreed strongly with my notion of the tripled amount of work and pointed out that:

it is often thought that artistic research is something light (or shallow), certainly not, it is three times more demanding. (...) I also thought, triple the amount. (Maria)

For example applications to raise financing for productions are hugely time-consuming and require a producer's working experience. This is evident in the following quotes:

I've had to raise a lot of funding, it's a big job. (...) It is a massive piece of production work to take care of. (Rosa)

I know I need to organize a lot by myself. (Jesse)

It has been suggested that getting assistance for productions, for example employing outside producers, would decrease the workload. One interviewee commented that it would not necessarily help because a person taking care of the organization needs to be familiar with the contents of the project and preferably also be a member of the production team.

No [outside] producer can do that because you have to know the contents of the work. (...) The [funding] applications have been more successful when I've done them myself. (Rosa)

This often invisible workload affects time management in particular: every hour spent on production tasks reduces the time for the research and artistic work. The following quotes exemplify the multitude of duties doctoral candidates handle alongside their artistic and scholarly work. Evidently the respondents are forced to master different capabilities, and do develop a professional competence when organizing production details, as the following extracts indicate.

I've also worked in other professional roles and still had this double role of artist-researcher. (...) I have had to function in totally different job assignments. Then I have all the research-related obligations: to inform supervisors and pre-examiners, remember to keep a diary and to think

about which direction to go, what to modify to develop my research – it is a huge piece of work. (Simo)

I could see in advance that this thing has to be taken care of now, otherwise it will not happen, so I'll deal with it. (...) There are so many things; you need to contact people, think about schedules and so on. (Maria)

An ability to organize not only the production work but also one's own time frame is one of the key skills gained during doctoral studies. In addition, students have to explain their research ideas to laypeople, and to summarize the research topic in an easily understandable form. Many policy documents stress the importance of so-called generic or transferable skills, which are today considered an essential part of a comprehensive doctoral training programme. (Newbury, 2011, p. 375) Transferable skills are broader competencies that complement research capabilities and are considered by several policy reports (for example Niemi et al., 2011, pp. 46–49) as necessary for future employment. The list of required dynamic skills or “business-oriented activities” in the EUA survey (Borrell-Damian, 2009, p. 87) is quite in line with the competencies doctoral candidates acquire in art universities during their time-consuming candidature: team player, leadership potential, ability to explain and communicate to non-specialists, entrepreneurial mindset, customer orientation, ability to work well across functional boundaries, social skills and experiences. Therefore, the question of production responsibility is not entirely a negative aspect of doctoral work in art universities although support should be arranged and available if required by a doctoral student.

#### 6.3.4 PROBLEMATIC DOCUMENTATION

One of the central processes in artistic or practice-based research is to systematically document the process of making an artwork, to demonstrate how different choices have been made and, if possible, what intentions directed the process. Careful documentation is essential when a doctoral candidate eventually writes and disseminates the research results to the

public. The results are usually conveyed in writing and sometimes a DVD is included with the book.<sup>43</sup>

Regarding the documentation of artistic productions, both universities specify that the student is responsible for carrying out careful documentation of his/her artistic projects for the pre-examiners and for the public defence. The institutions are obliged to assist doctoral candidates in organizing a high-quality recording that gives a clear picture of the content, and an exhibition of the production or project.

Documentation of the artistic productions is one of the aspects that add to the aforementioned workload. Both documentation and writing are investigated here in more detail because they seem to act as stumbling blocks along the doctoral journey. Both earlier research (Hockey, 2003, pp. 85–86) and the author's experience indicate that students face constant problems with this type of activity. Although artists keep notepads, write in diaries and draw in sketchbooks, analytical documentation has been claimed to constitute a distraction. Systematic analytic documentation was associated with the formalities of carrying out research and came as a surprise to Hockey's interviewees. Moreover, interviewees expressed concern that research might harm or freeze their practice by "breaking the flow or momentum of making and tearing oneself away from an activity central to artistic identity" (Hockey, 2003, p. 86). Likewise, Arlander (2011, p. 331), summarizing specific problems of artistic research, relates artists' lack of habits in documentation to "cherishing the perishable moment".

In the interviews, the importance of documentation was recognized but considered problematic. For most of the interviewees, it was one of those experiences that generated tension during the doctoral journey. The professor's or supervisor's lack of advice regarding the importance of maintaining adequate documentation is one reason that interviewees neglected to do so. The paucity of time was the other crucial reason given for failing to document carefully. Documentation was also overlooked because it was considered as self-evident or easily accomplished, thought to take place almost by itself. It was not pondered thoroughly enough, as is shown in this next experience:

43 In Finland, every dissertation is published either as a properly printed book or electronically. As the number of doctoral examinations has grown rapidly, printed books have become less common. Nonetheless, art universities still favour printed books and have their own publication units, Aalto Arts Book at Aalto University and Acta Scenica at the Theatre Academy.

When I was finalizing the written part I accidentally found important materials relating to my art projects. (...) I would actually have needed instructions for documentation, a list of things to do. (...) I regretted being unable to do it better. (Emma)

At the April Fools seminar, organized by the AvPhD project in the UK, issues of documentation were on the agenda. It was recognized that when the dissertation is about to be finished, a student usually regrets most any missed documentation. (Nelson, 2008, p. 32) Supervisors and students should prepare documentation carefully in advance and decide on strategies for carrying it out either by traditional notebooks or sketches or using video or other forms of digital technology. Students need to realize that documentation is not just a side activity but rather an essential component of the research process. Practical instructions, tips and checklists are needed to systematize the workflow as the next two quotations demonstrate:

I think it [documentation] was one weak point, (...) it was a point I should have thought out more carefully, defined more systematically what it is. (Nora)

I should have understood the meaning of documentation totally differently. I realize now that it has absurdly great importance. I wish someone had instructed me about it at the beginning. (Rosa)

In her artistic practice, Paula used to write short notes on manuscripts and she utilized that activity in her academic work. She was accustomed to putting her ideas on paper and received valuable advice from her supervisor to write down thoughts and their backgrounds, as footnotes.

I did it because I was used to doing it – it was more consciously emphasized [within research]. (Paula)

Simo solved the problem by documenting everything without thinking about whether it seemed important or not. He used several methods such as videos, images, written notes and diaries, while Nora relied mainly on written documentation.

I make notes, document without thinking, put thoughts onto paper or file information that might be helpful, what works, etc. Or I write diaries without knowing what it relates to, I express doubts, thoughts to myself, record them, and consider their implications. (Simo)

I've written about them [artistic projects], it is the main method, there are also videos and photographs. (Nora)

An additional problem concerns the nature of the artistic work, which might set limits on documentation. Sometimes the exact idea of the research makes documentation difficult or even impossible as was the case in one research topic that avoided the mere idea of documentation. The situation was not unique since, as Rye (2003) notes:

The research may be concerned with exactly those qualities of the live encounter and the production of embodied knowledge which cannot, by definition, be embedded, reproduced or demonstrated in any recorded document.

Maria discussed documentation systematically with her supervisor and clearly recognized the importance of carrying it out properly. She also talked about the issue in detail with her fellow artists.

I had to talk with the production team. (...) We talked about the need to document everything well. (Maria)

For a couple of respondents, video recording was the preferred method for documentation.

Needless to say, I documented it. All of them [artworks] have been videotaped. (Jesse)

Making an extensive visual recording of artistic works also serves another key purpose, namely it captures those non-verbal moments that are central in artistic research. Setting a camera on a tripod and letting it roll is not sufficient, an experienced documentation maker is needed to plan the documentation with the doctoral student. In Maria's project, there were



several aspects related mainly to spaces and sounds that were hard to document otherwise.

During the documentation, especially those non-linguistic facts that are extremely important in artistic research are recorded. I can document in writing that which happened, but a picture really tells much more than words, and movement and sound, everything, all this material that is documented, what happened there, I can return to those things whenever I like. (Maria)

Thus, properly executed documentation, with professional sound and imagery, helps a doctoral student to trace the relationship between art and research and to capture the ambiance and “live” sensations of space and sound and feelings in relation to audience responses. It is also a tool with which to communicate with others.

Documentation seems to be particularly problematic in the audiovisual field, where the hectic nature of productions makes it difficult to embark on detailed documentation. Shooting is time-consuming, with long and exhausting days, and it is often impossible to commit one’s thoughts to paper afterwards because there is simply not enough time. The shift from the visual to the written mode is not the issue in itself. As the quotation below illustrates, the professional practices involved on film sets limit how much reflection is even possible.

You are so exhausted with the film and everything else that you don’t even know how to start or what you should say. It is hard to give a shape to the documentation. (Erik)

When we met for the second time, he explained that most of his notes were the basis of an interview that was conducted and published shortly after the production.

I actually wrote mainly notes, I didn’t give them any form when writing. (...) There was an interview about me and the good thing was that, (...) at least quite a few aspects of things I had been thinking about, I had a chance to write them down [for the interview]. (Erik)

Nichols (2011, p. xvi) describes the reality of film-making and states that

there is no time to reflect and mull over what has been realized. Film-making involves a lot of pressures and tensions, particularly in relation to time and money. Zetterfalk (2011) posits that film as a field of artistic research is probably the most problematic in scope. Production costs are high and risk-taking is usually impossible. Nichols (2011) continues: “Once a shot is completed (and paid for), intense discussion of why it was done one way and not another, what the camera’s gaze implies ideologically, whether the intended colour symbolism succeeds or not, all becomes in a basic sense of the word, academic” (p. xv). Both writers approach practice-based research in film from the industry perspective and ignore other possible formats and shapes that film art in the academic environment can take.

Without proper documentation of either successful or failed projects, the evaluation of the significance of research is a complicated task. Documentation assists in articulating and explicitly demonstrating the undertaken creative processes. (Hockey & Allen Collinson, 2002, p. 352) Academic research differs essentially from professional artistic practice in its commitment to open up, share and account for the research process and to communicate the research results and the acquired knowledge intelligibly. (Newbury, 2011, p. 372). Documentation has also been argued to constitute an indispensable methodological tool. Practice-based research’s systematic reflection on the processes of making an artwork and detailed documentation of the process are essential as is the critical contextualization of working methods, outcomes and learnt experience. (Bell, 2006, pp. 89–90)

As mentioned earlier, research outcomes are addressed both in the academic forum and in the particular art forum. Therefore, “documentation, as well as the presentation and dissemination of the findings, needs to conform to the prevailing standards in both forums” (Borgdorff, 2011, p. 58). He recommends using innovative forms of documentation closer to artistic works. Those include portfolios, argumentations coded in scores, videos and diagrams. In other words, documentation should comprise aspects from both activity systems. When realized in writing, it is recognized by the scholarly community but, when utilizing tools appropriate to art, it is part of realizing the artwork. An example of the latter is the act of documenting live performances. (Rye, 2003)

In his seminar paper – while discussing the varied functions audio-visual documentation has in artistic research – Nykyri (2011) argues that documentation is not necessarily only a methodological tool but also a “multilayered reflective practice, a way of thinking and expertise of its own”.

Nykyri recognizes the hectic nature of creative practice where documenting by writing interrupts collaborative action. As an alternative, he has used images and video clips with sound as notes and found these necessary for the pace of exploratory artistic work. In developmental artistic work, the active documentation helps students later to describe, analyse, reflect on and write about the action in which they have been deeply engaged.

Nykyri refers to the concept of active documentation, which was developed by de Freitas (2002) in her interview study on MA students of art and design and entails “a planned and strategic method of producing tangible visual, textual or sound/video documentation of work in progress”, which, in turn, is utilized in reflective practice, that is, in activities the artist engages in critically when he/she contemplates the relationship between “conceptual, theoretical and practical concerns”. The creativity of documentation is also emphasized by Nelson (2008, p. 40) when he states that documentation of the artistic process and critical reflection involve a creative attitude and are not merely automatic measures to be taken care of.

An example of the efforts undertaken to tackle the problem of adequate and purposeful documentation is the Research Catalogue developed as a collaboration between 19 national and international partners, members of the Artistic Research Catalogue (ARC) Project led by the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, and launched at the beginning of March 2012. It gives a platform to and makes accessible the work of artist-researchers and facilitates discussion on research, methodological issues, dissemination of concrete results and communication of theoretical and artistic premises. The structure and interface allow different modes of exposition, such as photographs and videos, accompanied by written commentary.<sup>44</sup> The Journal of Artistic Research, the first peer-reviewed publication dedicated to artistic research, uses the Research Catalogue platform because it “facilitates multi-modal exposition, thereby meeting the desire of artistic researchers to have their work displayed and documented in a manner that demonstrates a respect for modes of presentation”<sup>45</sup>. A Finnish language version of the journal, Ruukku, was launched in early 2013.<sup>46</sup> Two of the interviewees were familiar with this system and had experience in publishing in this new format.

44 Retrieved January 13, 2014 from <http://www.researchcatalogue.net/portal/about>

45 Retrieved January 13, 2014 from <http://www.jar-online.net/index.php/pages/view/133>

46 Retrieved January 13, 2014 from <http://ruukku-journal.fi/en/presentation>

Every respondent called for instructions for documentation and recognized that the standards are still lacking. Articulating artistic processes and choices is an essential component of the research process, to raise awareness of the importance of this work and to familiarize students with visual and aural methodologies and documentation devices that can be utilized in conjunction with writing.

#### 6.3.5 FROM REFLECTION TO NEXUS

After each production, doctoral students are expected to write a report and reflect on their thoughts based on the documentation material. The process-focused nature of research is epitomized here. The interviewees acknowledged that reflection is necessary and agreed that a research attitude requires making their choices visible and demonstrating a high level of self-reflection.

I think that self-reflection is very essential, self-reflection as brought out in the text. In my opinion, it demonstrates the research orientation, if you show when things didn't go as planned; you tried to do one thing but ended up making something totally different. (Nora)

Thinking seems always to presuppose having peace and time. It is almost impossible to reflect and to clarify thoughts immediately after art productions are completed. The contemplation was described as hard work, a slow process, weird, and even irritating. It was clearly an activity students were not used to in their earlier art projects outside academia.

Each time the production is over I've tried to compile a report, as urged by my supervisor. Yes, I've done it but it has been remarkably difficult, everything is still in such a turmoil. If you think that you have failed in some respect, it prevents you from seeing clearly what happens on the level of research, I've realized that only after months is it possible to produce a somewhat sensible, analytic report. (Simo)

Afterwards I've examined [the productions], which was a really hard and slow [process]. Quite frankly, I was not up to it at all. It felt weird, because I'd never made art intended for later inspection. After a while, I managed to analyse, what was in there, what were the expectations

beforehand, what had I been thinking about the project and what I thought afterwards, what it [artwork] was really about, what questions arose from it, what went wrong so to speak and what went right and what elements of it would I want to refine in another art project. (Jesse)

Both failures and successes ought to be acknowledged. Nora noted that usually in research, the end result is supposed to display coherence and the overall image should be convincing. In reality, both scientific and artistic processes are disorganized, uncertainties need to be tolerated but, at the same time, one must maintain the belief that you are doing something significant.

Sometimes it is simply hard to find time for reflection, particularly written reflection. When a student is caught up in overlapping artistic projects, organizational skills are needed to ensure time for writing. Maria and Paula characterized their working methods as building a jigsaw or sorting out a pack of dominos, where a certain segment of time is spent on each block.

I take such times and moments (...), now it is time for writing, I need to parcel it out, I see it as a certain jigsaw, now I have this piece, and there's this artistic activity going on, sometimes they take place at the same time. (...) It is not easy and I wonder how others have managed. (Maria)

You need to have time for mulling things over and thinking, to do it in pieces, to stop and to reflect. (Paula)

Their descriptions are reminiscent of Denzin's and Lincoln's (2008) notion of research work being close to the idea of montage in film-making. This process of stitching, editing and putting slices of reality together in research means that a certain pattern emerges in "an interpretative experience" (p. 7).

Accordingly, critical reflection is a practice artists are not used to in their ordinary work outside of academia. (Arlander, 2011, p. 321) And there is usually no time for it. Retrospection causes tensions that affect both the art and the research, and reshape, revise and produce reassessment of both. The question therefore is not which is primary but that they are integral to each other, the written component adds depth, perception and a new dimension to the process as a whole. (Macleod & Holdridge, 2004, p. 157) Both can form part of a practice-based research project but it is important to be clear how each (theory and practice) can lead to development in the other.

(Candy & Edmonds, 2011, p. 122) A critical and reflective attitude as a tool in the research process is emphasized and it has led to more general discussions on the concept. Anttila (2005, pp. 77–79) explains that reflection means mental action where the mind turns back to itself, tracing the word back to the Latin “reflecto”, which means bending backwards, turning around or reflecting. Of the many theories on reflective practice, the most often referred to among practice-based researchers in art is Donald Schön’s (1991) notions of knowing as tacit, implicit and connected to action. Reflection-in-action occurs in a direct situation and often when something complex and unusual is encountered. Reflection-on-action, in turn, happens afterwards and is a more analytic process. (See also Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, 2011) Anttila (2005, pp. 78–79) notes that Schön’s approach emphasizes conscious processes where problems and uncertainties are solved as they arise during the task at hand. Often in the creative processes, goals and end results are usually more or less unknown both at the beginning and during the process. The processes and end results intertwine and the process is not very goal-oriented.

After the critical examination, students face the challenge of setting their artistic practice meaningfully into the theoretical framework and finding the right balance between theory and art. The expected relationship between practice and theory, no matter how either is defined, necessitates tolerating a relatively never-ending reformulation of research questions after finishing the process of art-making. Going back and forth between art-making and theoretical thinking is not an anomaly but is pertinent within artistic or practice-based research, where research ideas and questions, perspectives and viewpoints evolve. (Kiljunen & Hannula, 2001) This concerns both the research question and its connection to the theoretical framework.

During art production, doctoral students seem to concentrate entirely on art-making and tend to brush aside theoretical interests.

When you are working on an artistic project you tend to become really blind, to focus so much on this one thing [artwork] that you lose the capacity to look critically at the whole work. (Erik)

The main thing for me was to concentrate on doing [art]. (...) Although I knew this [work] was part of my research, I did not think about it at that time. (Emma)

Simo pointed out that theory may become frustrating if it is embedded

forcibly into practice. He abandoned the theoretical approach since it did not contribute to the points of views he felt were intuitively important. The theoretical framework may also be very wide and it is inconceivable to include every aspect but rather to choose those that best serve the research interest.

Very quickly I became frustrated with theory. (...) I experienced it as strange, to embed it there. (...) It started to distance itself and didn't offer any gripping surface, I couldn't intuitively reach important things via it. (Simo)

Those [theoretical] things, they are not all included because it is such a huge package that you cannot take everything although you wish to. (Paula)

For Iris, it was important to emphasize practice so that her research always has an impact on the development of her respective art field. She felt that if research increases an artist's understanding of his/herself it improves the quality of the art.

And I try to concentrate on practice and think what meaning this [conceptual] discussion has on practice itself, that has been the question for me all the time. (Iris)

These comments indicate a slight concern that if one concentrates too much on theory, the necessary intuition for art disappears. Stewart (2001) has argued recently that "formalising practice as research will destroy creativity, encumber practice and deny the role of intuition, serendipity and spontaneity". In other words, the shift towards theoretical contemplation affects art-making in a negative way, poses a threat to and might even kill the creative flow. Aziz (2009, p. 70) acknowledged his discomfort with research activities:

My reluctance to consider this path flowed from a very real concern that the research activity would detract from art-making or even suspend the creative act altogether, thus subordinating creative production to the research process.

However, Smith and Dean (2010, p. 25) maintain that speaking about the risk of theorizing and documenting artistic work as potentially “subduing the creative fire or reducing the range of responses to their work” represents the mystification of artists’ work and reinforces romantic ideas concerning the spontaneity of the creative process. Such thinking implies that research activities are not creative although in reality they are very much so.

As stated, the interviewees were confident that practice produces knowledge. The elaboration of a research question usually takes place after art production, that is, productions assist in finding out what theoretical aspects are relevant for the research as a whole. Although the process is unpredictable, even chaotic, the responses indicate that interviewees accept the nature of artistic research as something where questions and viewpoints transform. The research process requires constant balancing between art-making and theoretical considerations.

[I had to] change my topic because the art I now realize no longer answers the question I started from and on the basis [of my art] the questions are now quite different. (Nora)

Definitely it [the question] will change. I’m constructing certain questions [based on my art-making] and will definitely answer them in a different way than I’d expected. (...) And, I have to reflect on what I’ve thought before, in a new way. (Jesse)

I started with the scholarly model by making hypotheses and asking questions, systematically. (...) But clearly they [the questions] have changed because practice produces so much knowledge that only then you begin to understand what is relevant. (Simo)

From the beginning, my idea was to do artistic work in parallel and nested within theoretical pondering and writing. I imagined that I would do research utilizing the methods of artistic research and hence the questions have been transformed into another form (...) and I knew they will change again when you look at them afterwards. (Paula)

It should be acknowledged that carrying out research “in parallel with making works and engaging in the process of developing frameworks that guide practice” (Candy & Edmonds, 2011, p. 127) is not a straightforward or



smooth process. As Bolt (2006) maintains “theorizing out of practice (...) involves a very different way of thinking than applying theory to practice”. In other words, “disembodied theory serves little useful purpose” (Grierson, 2012, p. 71); instead, theory should be something that can be activated in practice. These difficulties, that is, where theoretical starting points are not easily applied as such, are evident in Jesse’s comment:

I had written about the presuppositions and questions arising from the production, but to reflect upon it with a chosen theoretical approach was impossible. (...) I realized that I didn’t need to disassemble all of it and it [art project] would never open up so that it had a straightforward connection to my theory but the part that had the connection should be developed in the next art project. (Jesse)

This insightful comment implies that reflection means not only reflecting back on past projects but also on those in the future. Within the concept of reflection, various ways of reflection are nested inside one another. As Hughes (2015) rightly points out, reflection into the future should have an equal footing as reflecting into the past and present practices.

One may find a plethora of descriptions for the process of intertwining theory and practice. For Macleod (2000), it is a see-saw which means that “the written text was instrumental to the conception of the art projects but the art projects themselves exacted a radical rethinking because the process of realizing or making artwork altered what had been defined in written form”. Mäkelä has developed a tool for retrospective gaze, which allows a researcher to revisit and re-explore the artwork. (Staff, 2012, p. 79) Bell (2008, p. 177) depicts it as “a virtuous hermeneutical circle of critically informed practice”, comprising a cycle of reading, making, documenting, reflecting, writing up, public communication and criticism. Yeates and Carson (2009) talk about the “border traffic between theory and practice” and the “interweaving of critical and creative work” and the “innovative threading and productive tension surrounding the theory/practice nexus”.

Any of the above definitions are well-suited to Rosa’s comment, where she ponders in depth her adopted approach and relationship between art and theory. The description highlights the processual nature of artistic doctorates and the significance of philosophical thinking in art-making. She perceives thinking in its broadest sense: it belongs to all three realms, art, theory and writing.

When I made [artworks], I developed my own tools further. (...) My approach is to think (...) theoretically and I think in writing but I have to think also through [artworks]. (...) I have questions that interest me, that I reflect upon; I read philosophy when I think about them again and engage in that kind of dialogue, but then the questions are reshaped and focused, new findings emerge and thinking is reshaped so that the theory kind of redirects the thinking and [artworks] redirect it further. (Rosa)

One cannot know beforehand what kind of knowledge art practice will produce. The dialogic nature is evident in the following comment:

I'd wish to realize [artworks] that could have a kind of a dialogue with the research or the scientific or on such levels. (...) Because you cannot anticipate beforehand how the production will succeed, (...) what takes place in these processes, it is impossible to predict and they again affect how the research proceeds. (Simo)

Candy and Edmonds (2011, p. 127) discuss the “cyclical process of putting theoretical knowledge into practice and revising theory as a result of the outcome”, which is clearly reflected in the following comment. Practice creates knowledge, which adds to theoretical understanding.

I'm constructing certain questions that I've got about art-making and I will surely answer them differently than anticipated. I need to reflect differently upon what I've thought thus far. Artworks bring flesh to the theoretical skeleton. (Jesse)

In these experiences theoretical insights are clearly woven into practice in a meaningful way and not “thrown at it like mud”, which, according to Nelson (2008, p. 30), is easily recognized in PhD works where theory and art are split. Emma, when talking about her nearly finished doctoral project, said that her work was exactly like that, the first part involved theoretical writings and, in the second, she accounted for the artistic projects. The required dialogue was missing and her supervisors advised her to rewrite.

Such a dualistic approach, that is, to keep the theoretical thinking and artistic works separate during the research process, may have an instrumental value. For Maria, it was a way of preserving intuition.

I try to differentiate between theoretical and artistic development, maybe on a meta level or in my mind: it makes things easier (...) I'm aware that in principle the theory and art should not be separate and in a way they are one. (...) For me it is some kind of a defence mechanism that I can develop the artistic project because it is so much a question of intuition. (Maria)

At least the content is at the moment twofold, they are separate. (...) I know exactly how it should be, how they connect to each other and how the theoretical part is hooked to method (...) but they are not nested and they do not overlap in the text. (Amos)

They were well aware of the requirements based on the nature of the relationship, but thought that such an approach would aid them when structuring the work as a whole and when developing the research object. Amos was convinced that the process would eventually solve the problem of integration. For Maria, intuition meant putting theoretical considerations aside for a while, keeping the process as open as possible and avoiding prior hypotheses and too pragmatic attitude prior to the production.

The artistic project, it has so much to do with intuition. (...) I wish to keep [the relationship] deliberately enigmatic for myself because if I go through it beforehand there is nothing [to find out]. (Maria)

The final submission is supposed to comprise a coherent whole, where various threads are connected. It seems that all the interviewees aim at construing a research outcome where the organic relationship between the two is reached, whether theoretical concepts are used in the development of practice or vice versa, or "theory is revisited in light of practice, using praxis as evidence" (Ravelli et al., 2013, p. 407). In this Australian study, various interrelations between the written thesis and the artistic elements in performing and visual arts were examined. The authors note that "there is no one 'correct' way of presenting a doctoral thesis" (p. 416) but a continuum of relations. Basing their analysis on four completed doctoral projects and interviews, the relationship has been categorized as separated versus connected, the first comprising the sub-categories "parallel" versus "influenced" and the second consisting of "incorporated" and "intermingled" (p. 416).

In parallel doctoral projects, there is little textual connection between

the creative work and written text, although the doctoral process may have been integrated. In influenced theses “the written component is largely construed as being separate from the creative while acknowledging a relation of ‘influence’ between the two” (p. 403). In the “incorporated” model, constant and explicit references to artistic productions are organically included in the written text. Two parts are linked in more sense than one and the practice contributes to the development of theoretical concepts, constantly bouncing back and forward between each other. (pp. 405, 408) If a thesis is “intermingled”, the creative and written are encountered together and the writing may be stylistically unconventional and personal. The written “refers constantly to the creative project and the overall research process, in a way which presents them as inseparable” (p. 411) and the verbal forms a central component of the creative, the “language of the written component constructs a seamless, interdependent relation between the two components” (Ravelli et al., 2013, p. 412).

### 6.3.6 WRITING

In the research literature, in particular in Hockey’s and Allen Collinson’s (2002, 2003) studies, it has been claimed that one of the critical moments in conducting research in an art university is conveying one’s experiences in writing. Writing and art-making are argued to constitute two incompatible competences or two distinctive activities and therefore writing is problematic for artists. Moving into the writing mode represents a shift from one mindset to another, requires new skills to be absorbed from the visual to written and, in doctoral works, artists may avoid it altogether. (Hockey, 2003) Also, Simmons et al. (2008, pp. 7–8) discovered that writing about artwork was difficult for master’s and doctoral candidates of fine arts since they identified writing as being a weakness compared with their existing skills. The need to develop new skills may be a reality shock for those finding themselves in an unfamiliar situation.

Is there really a contradiction between creative practice and writing about it or could these two be seen as a valuable combination? The data for this study support the latter view since the interviewees had no apparent difficulties in writing and did not regard writing as overly troublesome, although for some it was a new activity. Thus, there seems to be a balance between writing and art-making and, in some cases, writing is seen as an equally strong capability or mode of expression as art.

Writing is easy for me, I feel primarily that I'm a writer, I've been a writer longer than I've been an artist, it makes things easier in this phase, to have no fear of writing although scientific writing is not easy, it is somehow a different skill, but I feel that it is a great plus to have some experience as a writer. (Nora)

It was not a major obstacle for me. (...) I've liked writing but of course I've had to learn this particular way of writing. (Simo)

Writing is quite natural for me. (...) I like to express myself by writing, which is good because I know that for everyone this is not the case, that for artists it's not necessarily easy. (...) I've written poems, I've always been interested in it. (Maria)

It [scientific writing] is a kind of new thing, although I write a lot. (Iris)

Writing is pretty easy although I've got no background as a writer. (Paula)

The ease with which the respondents in this study relate to writing is in contrast to the findings of Hockey and Allen Collinson and could be explained by the single fact that their study was completed in 1995 and, in the 2010s, the situation is different: the research practices have matured, there is already some experience of artistic doctorates. Secondly, if we take a look into the respondents' backgrounds, three of them had additional university studies, where writing skills played a crucial role, before starting the doctorate at the art university. The other obvious explanation is that only those who already possess writing skills apply to doctoral programmes. An additional fact supporting the findings is that practice in writing is gained when writing fiction, screenplays and plays. In artistic areas of this study, in the audiovisual field and in the performing arts, much artistic work involves writing. Some of the respondents were familiar with writing also as journalists or art critics.

I'm an experienced writer [in my field of art] (...) I've written all the texts [related to productions], it's a key component of what I do. I've written also articles but not research texts or scientific articles. I didn't have any experience in that type of writing but it has not been difficult. (Rosa)

I often write for journals, being doing it regularly for eight years. I've also experience in academic writing when doing [my former academic degree] (...) I have always liked writing, but would not consider myself to be a writer. (Erik)

Also, Stewart (2001) points out that writing in research is quite similar to writing a grant proposal or publication for an exhibition or performance. It requires a well-structured text with an introduction, an explanation of the relevance of the work, the need to situate the work within the art field, and a description of the process of production and its outcomes – all of which are also requirements for a scholarly text. In addition, one of the interviewees had published a professional book on his/her field of study.

I was familiar with [the field], and writing the book sparked my interest. (Amos)

The other important observation concerns the balance between theoretical writing and descriptions or verbalizations of their artistic processes. The respondents find it hard to synchronize their subjective point of view with theoretical considerations. They acknowledged a necessity to learn and absorb academic language but, at the same time, wished to avoid undue complexity or jargon in their texts. It was considered important that the research results should be understandable to the general public. To balance the requirements of academic language with those of comprehensible writing and to maintain an artist's voice in the text were a challenge.

I try to avoid complicated wording and complexity, I've been told that my style is very journalistic, in other words quite entertaining. (...) Many things could be said more simply but there is a danger that you generalize too much. (Nora)

How to balance between description, when you describe your artistic processes, which requires finding words for somewhat difficult things and on the other hand the tradition and model of theoretical writing, how to balance the subjective points of view with quotations and references and sources. (...) How to get a grip that it is not too subjective but neither is it a pseudo-scientific passive form, how to be between those two. (Simo)

How to write about and verbalize the artistic parts. (...) How to find the balance so that your language remains fresh. (Paula)

Maria asked if thesis writing can and maybe should be seen as a creative process in the same way as art-making.

With the students, we talk a lot about the text and ponder if it needs to be a work of art; is it not enough that there is the artwork? Language can be used poetically or rhythmically, without it being a stream of consciousness, or the text doesn't need to be just a report, how to find the balance. (Maria)

Paula found it important that an artist lets his/her experience and voice be exposed in the text.

You should avoid the situation where you first build a massive theoretical framework and forget to include your own voice. I will definitely talk about my productions, what I have done and what are included in the thesis. (Paula)

Rarely are the features of written text considered to be creative as such. However, Grierson (2012) writes about creative research, as it is called in Australia, and notes that it "can be text-based in which language is itself a creative practice" (p. 66). Objective language is usually prioritized so that students "effectively write themselves out of the research" (p. 68) and forgot to cherish the vivid language. The authentic voice is missing or disappears if practice is academized with the help of authorities, such as Heidegger or Deleuze, who ostensibly add weight to the practical work. (Biggs & Karlsson, 2011b, p. 417) De Freitas (2000) talks about the "superfluous academization of exegesis" with "strained theoretical connections", meaning that sometimes students apply theoretical frameworks or fashionable theoretical perspectives, which do not have any connections to their art projects. On the other end of the continuum, you may find a situation where a student concentrates solely on the creative work and pays little attention to critical issues or research questions, the end result being an "exegesis as afterthought" (Kroll, 2009, p. 9). This kind of thinking emerged once in the interviews but only as a starting point for research. Quite soon the interviewee realized that she needed to find a theoretical framework for her research.

Many of the interviewees were grateful for their supervisor's precise attitude and habit of correcting texts while giving feedback on the chapters. In addition, supervisors encouraged them to write economically and intelligibly, but at the same time maintain a professional point of view, as the following quotations show.

My supervisor has made comments like 'do not mystify it [the art project] too much or try to be too poetic' although it would be wonderful. (...) The other supervisor encouraged me to keep the professional voice or point of view present in writing, to express your artistry also on the level of language. (Paula)

I've also received negative feedback for using unnecessary scientific language with passive forms and so forth. In other words, not trying to modify what you have experienced. (...) That is what I meant by balancing. (Simo)

Rosa raised an important notion that, although there are certain rules, each writer has latitude to break them, which obviously involves quite a lot of courage. To modify the writing so that it fits the project at hand was important to her.

I'm not nervous about the limits of doing something right because I know you can always stretch the limits and create your own practices. (Rosa)

The interviewees also emphasized that at undergraduate level in art universities little attention is paid to the development of writing or research skills, as is also maintained by Hockey (2008, p. 111). Practitioners have not necessarily been trained in academic writing traditions because usually the curricula comprise only random writing exercises, which are more or less connected to the artistic productions. Artists may have had earlier traumatic writing-related experiences that can be relieved by practising and developing writing skills. Only recently has there been a strong tendency to introduce more research orientation and writing courses into the artistic degree. (Pentikäinen, 2006, p. 30)



Writing must be taught and guided, traumas unloaded and improvement encouraged. (Rosa)

Macleod and Holdridge (2011) maintain that “through the documenting, charting, formulating or even fictionalizing of the research enquiry, writing can convince us that we have gained new insights and understandings” (p. 367). Newbury (2011, p. 383) reminds us that writing has multiple purposes. It can be part of the methodology or reflection or an output, the last being the closest to academic writing for a thesis or journal. The cited interview extracts exemplify the need to bring writing into a more productive relationship with arts practice and to favour more descriptive forms of writing and visual means to document and reflect on the progress of artistic work. Newbury (2011) further claims that creative arts research has reached maturity when it faces directly the challenge of writing. It is no use arguing that artists have a special problem with writing. Consequently, in this study there seems to be some evidence for the “maturity” of arts research, to see writing as a capability that is as strong as art-making.

### 6.3.7 COURSEWORK AND TEACHING

The final sub-theme examines the role of teaching and education in the doctoral experience. In both universities, the required studies comprise 60 ECTS credits and contain courses on research methods, the history and philosophy of art, writing skills, on the one hand, and studies related to the research topic, on the other. The question of studies was not included in the original interview agenda but was one of those themes that arose among the other issues. In general, accomplishing the coursework was not a major concern for doctoral students, not even acquiring the theoretical knowledge caused uneasiness. The issue of credit points was brought up in only one interview.

I liked all those courses where I've written essays. (...) I've forced myself to read huge amounts of philosophy, so much that I have no use for it. (...) I've also forced myself to make presentations, I gather credit points from them. (Iris)

Paula touched on the role of courses briefly when she stated that studies related to artistic and practice-based research are more easily available

nowadays. Amos found the lack of research knowledge in undergraduate studies as problematic. Rosa participated in a course that was aimed at those who wished to develop their research plans before applying for doctoral studies. The focus of the course was on scientific research methods.

It has progressed so much, there are studies available for research orientations in every department so that you no longer need to dig for them. (Paula)

To do research, it is like being thrown into cold water, (...) because I, at least, had not done any courses, there should be some basic ability to start doing research. (Amos)

The idea of such a course was that those who are making research plans, participate in it. (Rosa)

Rather than discussing studies and coursework, we ended up talking about experiences related to the doctoral students' own teaching. For Iris and Maria, teaching work acted partly as an impetus for the emergence of research ideas. Maria noticed that new knowledge is required concerning the topic of her instruction. Iris thought that the questions that originated in her professional practice were also very relevant in educational settings.

Via teaching I recognized that there's a certain need for such discussion. (Maria)

The question that bothered me arose first and foremost in teaching where the pace is fast, very seldom is there time to think over things that have troubled me, things that need to be clarified. (Iris)

Iris talked quite extensively about her own teaching and considered it relevant that her research contributes to practical endeavours so that the results will be utilized in teaching at some point. In the courses she taught, the significance of her topic was revealed and she was happy to provide students with fresh insights.

Maria taught in several institutes, both in polytechnics and in universities, because her research topic attracted widespread interest. She easily combined research ideas and notions gained in teaching. She was also the

only interviewee who had held courses together with her supervisors. Amos and Rosa also utilized their research topic when planning future courses.

I built study modules based on my research, how it [the research idea] could work and students could test them in projects. (Amos)

Occasional teaching assignments maintain and develop contacts with professional peers. Finnish universities encourage doctoral candidates to contribute to undergraduate instruction in order to enhance the relationship between undergraduate and postgraduate education. Doctoral candidates also benefit, they receive fruitful feedback and encouragement.

Via teaching, when I've been asked to teach courses, (...) and in the courses and within my own department, the emerging discussion and feedback, which is in a sense beyond peer discussion, have been very fruitful at times. (Simo)

The teaching activities of doctoral students also have other functions, namely they take the knowledge of research to the departmental level, which positively affects attitudes towards research activities and demonstrates how research topics can be utilized in undergraduate education, which, in turn, has a positive impact on the research culture in general.

Little by little it has changed, the graduates [doctors of art] have started working at the departments and others have realized that you can utilize research in teaching. (Simo)

Cummings (2010), in his integrated conception of doctoral education, gathers that "doctoral practices constitute more than the multiplicity of activities" (p. 31) and lists both coursework and teaching as part of them. Whereas coursework is counted as primary in a sense of often being obligatory, teaching as secondary is something that mediates the doctoral experience but is not absolutely necessary for it. The interviewees value the opportunity to teach and often receive valuable feedback from teaching assignments, maintain connections with other teachers and test research ideas in practice. The three worlds of art, research and education interact, each impacting the development of the other. (Thornton, 2013, p. 133)

## 6.4 Discursive mediation: supervision

### 6.4.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned earlier, the study started as an exploration into the supervision<sup>47</sup> of artistic or practice-based doctorates. Based on my experience as a member of support services at an art university, I deduced that supervision was worth investigating and should be rethought within a developing research culture. The research published during the last number of decades seems to indicate the central role of supervision in a successful doctoral study process. Furthermore, policy makers and governmental bodies have stressed that proper supervision motivates, affects productivity, performance and knowledge production in research, its results, quality and output. (Niemi et al., 2011, pp. 34–35; Karjalainen, 2006, pp. 76–78)

Even though a lot of research has been undertaken, supervision is still recognized as practically and theoretically problematic, complex and dynamic, and a phenomenon not well understood because it is basically an undocumented activity. (Green, 2005, pp. 151, 156; Gurr, 2001, p. 90) Attempts to theorize about supervision pedagogy have been limited and there is a lack of conceptual understanding of what supervisory practices involve. (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004, p. 100; Holligan, 2005, p. 268) This deficiency is caused by the nature of supervision as one of the most private pedagogical relationships (Manathunga, 2010) or a ‘black box’, a privatized space. (Goode, 2010, p. 39) It is also common to assume that everyone knows what supervision is (Aittola, 1995, p. 20) or that the roles of supervisor and student are taken for granted. Supervisors and students seldom negotiate the expectations and purposes of supervisory encounters. (Vehviläinen, 2009, p. 188)

The requirements and conduct of supervision are obviously connected to the purpose of the doctorate. Section 2.2.2 outlined a brief overview of the objectives of a doctoral degree. Supervisors and other significant people,

47 I use supervision as a generic concept, covering both advisor and supervisor. According to Nummenmaa and Soini (2008, p. 49), academic supervision is given at a university and aims at developing the doctoral candidate’s scientific education and thinking (...) and general professional expertise.

who share an understanding of research topics in art universities, are the cornerstones of artistic and/or academic communities and form the seeds of a particular research culture, together with those who are in the process of becoming members of this culture. Supervisory practices are either burdened or enriched by current forms of research. Some writers, for instance Biggs and Büchler (2009, pp. 3, 12), claim that the purpose is not at all clear and therefore supervision is complex because it attempts to produce research that imitates established paradigms rather than being in accordance with its own world view.

In this section, supervision is studied from different angles, starting from finding the right persons for the task, to discussing the supervision of artistic productions and the integration of art and theoretical insights. The focus is on how these mediational means and activities appear and are manifested in the interviews in the diversity of the interviewees' conceptions of supervision.

From the activity theoretical point of view, supervision is a particularly discursive mediational tool. As Wells (2007, pp. 160, 175) points out, discursing means the use of language in interaction with others and is an essential tool in any collaborative activity where people share their thinking, refine their understanding and recognize the contribution of others. (Chernobilsky et al., 2003) Discursing includes culturally structured transactions between human participants, which are governed by genres and genre-like patterns. In other words, linguistic resources, speech and written texts mediate action towards the anticipated outcome. Goals are both constructed and achieved through discursing. (Wells, 2007, pp. 169, 176–177)

Thus, supervision is explored here as one of the central mediating activities that assist doctoral students during their study times. Supervisors are obviously also part of an academic or artistic division of labour, which tells us how the community organizes itself in order to perform the process of transformation from goal towards outcome. (Kuutti, 2011, p. 2) Further, supervision is governed by rules and regulations usually explained in supervisory agreements. The rules indicate what supervisors are actually supposed to do. The supervisory duties and responsibilities are outlined in guidelines which, at least in the two universities examined in this study, are quite similar. A supervisor is expected to instruct the student in doctoral studies and in making, following and possibly revising the study plan and research proposal, guiding the process of writing the dissertation, planning and working out the research and artistic work or design practice, and helping him/her to make

contacts within the research community. At Theatre Academy, a supervisor is also expected to instruct the planning and execution of scientific and artistic work and in compiling the dissertation. He/She encourages independent studies, helps the student to prepare publications, presentations and performances, and facilitates contact with the research and artistic communities.

The students, in turn, should report to the supervisor each term on the progress of their work. At the very beginning, and at various intervals thereafter, the supervisor and the student should discuss the expectations and agree on the preconditions of supervision, including frequency of meetings, the submission of written work, etc. A written supervision agreement, where responsibilities, rights and obligations are agreed, is compulsory.<sup>48</sup>

#### 6.4.2 FINDING THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE POSITION OF SUPERVISOR

The first practical action in doctoral studies is to find a competent supervisor, which, in new fields of research, is not necessarily an easy task. At the beginning of doctoral education in art universities, when there were no “own” graduates, art universities were forced to rely on the expertise of professors who had graduated from other universities. Their disciplines were not necessarily directly related to the diverse and unique research topics doctoral candidates at art universities were pursuing. At that time, few professors in art universities had doctoral degrees or were experienced researchers.<sup>49</sup> It was and still is quite a challenge to find experts with the dual ability to instruct in theory and in art (Rinne & Sivenius, 2007, p. 1092), given the two incompatible competencies, “the one that satisfies the demands of the university, and the one that looks after the non-academic structures of art production” (Candlin, 2000). The situation has improved markedly since university statistics reveal that more than 300 doctors of arts have graduated

48 Supervision of Doctoral Candidates at Aalto University (2011); Theatre Academy Helsinki, Postgraduate Student Guide (2011).

49 It should be noted that most professors in Finnish art universities are nominated on artistic grounds. At Aalto University, the title Professor of Practice refers to a respected professional who is qualified through his/her artistic work. Professors are therefore not expected to be experienced researchers. Retrieved August 28, 2014 from [http://www.aalto.fi/en/about/careers/other\\_academic\\_positions](http://www.aalto.fi/en/about/careers/other_academic_positions)

from Finnish art universities.<sup>50</sup> Also, for example in the UK, quite a few capable artists have completed their PhDs by practice and work currently in academia. (ten Brink, 2008, p. 34) Moreover, through international conferences, researchers in art universities have gotten to know each other, sharing best practices and procedures.<sup>51</sup>

Experiences differ, for some finding the right person was quite an easy task and occurred at the beginning of their studies, for others the process had taken more time. Supervisor and student may have known each other beforehand, for example on the grounds of examination of the student's MA thesis, or they might have worked together on a joint project. When I asked at what point the supervisor was nominated, two interviewees noted that:

At an early stage, because for me it was quite clear that I wished to be supervised by the same person who examined the master's thesis, and the other was the professor in my field. (Simo)

Early because the situation was clear, it was easy. (Maria)

This is the case especially at the Theatre Academy, where the supervisory relationship may already start during the application phase.

When I met the professor in charge for the first time, she started to supervise me on how to write the application, what it should contain. (Jesse)

Usually, the first supervisor is nominated at the beginning of the doctoral studies and the second a little later after the study has progressed. Students seem to carefully consider who would be the right person for the task. This may also be due to the fact that generally it takes time before doctoral students start preparations for their artistic projects so it was quite natural

50 Retrieved January 5, 2014 from <http://vipunen.csc.fi/fi-fi/yliopistokoulutus/tutkinnot/Pages/default.aspx>

51 Several conferences on artistic or practice-based research are organized annually or biannually. These include, for instance, the Art and Research conference at Aalto University, Sensuous knowledge in Bergen, conference series organized by ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts) and the Share Network.

that nominating the second supervisor occurred some time after nominating the first.

I thought about the second supervisor for a long time, it took time, it took a year. (Rosa)

For approximately a year, we pondered on different options. (Iris)

The research plan was interdisciplinary and between art fields, it was difficult to find a supervisor with whom I could wind up working, it took its own time. (Amos)

In two cases, the process of finding another supervisor, especially for the artistic production, was still ongoing. Sometimes the first supervisor participates in the process of finding the second one.

It would be good to have two supervisors now when I'm starting my first production. (...) [My supervisor] is thinking about that, too. (Maria)

It is hard to find a person (...) because the relationship between professionals [from my art field] and the academic world is still at an early stage. (Erik)

Maria and Erik were both interviewed again approximately one year later. The nomination of Maria's supervisor had progressed but Erik's had not. In Maria's case, the most important aspect was her second supervisor's similar approach to art.

Yes, I found the second supervisor and I'm very satisfied. We met recently for the first time. (...) And discovered exactly similar common ground. (Maria)

Finding the right person that would have experience in [my art field] and at the same time some scholarly background and enough time to spend reading and supervising and so on, it is really challenging. I don't really know the right candidate so that is a problem. (Erik)



Although Erik thought it was problematic to work on his art project without a supervisor's help, for others the time that elapsed in finding the second supervisor did not give rise to any major concerns.

Issues may also arise because supervisors themselves hesitate to accept the responsibility because they may be new to academia and are not familiar with academic traditions and expectations towards supervisory practices (Rinne & Sivenius, 2007, p. 1093). Thus, the lack of confidence in their academic abilities is caused by not knowing what guiding research means.

There is no prior research in this area. It was really difficult to find a second supervisor. Quite a few refused because they were not experts in the field. (Nora)

Research communities in art universities are still evolving and colleagues may not be so active in research but concentrate on educating future artists. The unique and often interdisciplinary topics are challenging for both experienced and inexperienced supervisors.

#### 6.4.3 DIVIDED SUPERVISION

Working with only one, usually theoretically oriented supervisor, may lead to a situation where the focus of the supervision is inevitably on the theoretical aspects of the research. The theoretical emphasis is evident at least at the beginning of studies, as the following remarks demonstrate.

It [supervision] was quite concentrated on theory. (Emma)

The emphasis has been on the theory side (...) I mean scholarly theory for doing research which is my weak point. (Amos)

This situation is not necessarily a problem because usually artists need advice on theoretical issues. As stated earlier, sometimes doctoral students in art universities need to acquire a rudimentary theoretical knowledge because their earlier studies have been almost entirely about the practicalities of art-making. Those supervisors obviously keep students informed about the theoretical discussions, frameworks and developments in their field.

But, on the other hand, being supervised by a theoretically oriented person may involve some complications. For instance, Iris was hesitant to

initiate contact with her supervisor because she considered that she was not familiar enough with the conceptual component of her dissertation before having to discuss the writing with her supervisor.

With the theory supervisor, I was a bit shy about starting the process.  
(... ) I was quite timid and afraid that I would confuse the concepts.  
(Iris)

Elkins (2009) acknowledges this kind of “timidness” and points out that many artists are insecure about theory: they have not had enough prior knowledge and do not know what they are permitted to say. To move freely within theory requires quite a thorough understanding of the theoretical framework in order to produce “genuinely well-informed, professional-level practitioners, who really know the issues and how to intervene in current critical impasses” (p. 280).

Who then is the right person for the task? According to the regulations, at least one of the supervisors should hold a doctor’s degree and, if the dissertation includes artistic productions, one “must have adequate artistic qualifications and superior knowledge of the field in question”<sup>52</sup>. At the Theatre Academy, supervisors represent “the highest possible expertise available in your area of research and methodology”<sup>53</sup>.

Thus, in the guidelines, supervision is not divided in accordance with theory and art. However, in everyday discourse, supervision is expressed in terms of this division. From the beginning, the division has intrigued me and it was one of the first questions and driving forces behind this study. Also, in the interviews, it was very common to talk about theory and art supervision as separate issues. The interview accounts demonstrate that, in most cases, supervisors with purely scientific backgrounds are usually aware of their limits concerning their incomplete knowledge of art and state outright that the artistic component is not within their area of expertise.

She has emphasized that part of the field [of my research] is not her area, but she supervises the section that is. (Nora)

52 Retrieved October, 13, 2013 from <https://into.aalto.fi/display/endoctoraltaik/Supervision+of+Dissertation>.

53 Postgraduate Student Guide (2011), p. 25.

On the other hand, a supervisor's expertise is often precious in ensuring understanding of various conceptual approaches and connections between philosophical orientations.

Although I ask about small particular details, like the history of some concepts, they are worth gold because I'm not used to receiving any help, (...) I highly appreciate it. (Rosa)

He sent me a text (...) it was very good, there were such connections that I would not have been able to make by myself, between various philosophical schools of thought. (Iris)

Theoretically oriented supervisors' understanding of the specific nature of practice-based or artistic research, or what it means to be an artist, varies. One interviewee experienced that because the supervisor had limited knowledge of art, difficulties emerged in understanding the scope and extent of the artistic work. Her artistic projects took a long time to complete and were time-consuming. When she approached her supervisor, he seemed to think that she actually had not done anything even though she was in the middle of her art project.

I asked for a recommendation [for a scholarship] and he gave it but said that it was only if I promised to concentrate on the dissertation. I thought that I was working on it full time. (Emma)

[A supervisor] should understand the difference between being an artist and a theorist. (Jesse)

In earlier research literature, it has been suggested that the theory supervisor's identification with the artistic field or understanding of the range of potential projects that may constitute practice-as-research is decisive. (Lebow, 2008, p. 206) Also, supervisors need to be familiar with the debates about artwork as research because "only by this knowledge they would be able to approach the question of how, if and in what circumstances, art work counts as research from a number of different perspectives and discipline bases" (Macleod & Holdridge, 2011, p. 366).

The interview data of this study showed that there were supervisors with university backgrounds who were not very familiar with the

methodology of practice-based research but shared a serious interest in the various topics of research.

My other supervisor is very excited about my work, (...) the feedback she has given has been very valuable. (Rosa)

In other words, the theoretical background of a supervisor does not exclude a genuine interest in artistic research. I specifically asked if the theoretically oriented supervisors had seen the art projects and some respondents emphasized that they had received feedback from them on their artistic work. While some interviewees discussed art projects with their supervisors in detail, others had just obtained fragmentary remarks.

He has seen my productions, and of course we have talked about them, after the productions. (Paula)

[My theory supervisor] has seen my productions and she understands them and finds my system meaningful. (Rosa)

[The theory supervisor] gives very little feedback on artistic work, only off-hand remarks. (Jesse)

Paula pointed out very firmly that she did not compare her supervisors or wish to define one as a theoretical and the other as an artistic supervisor. All members of her supervisory team were doctors of art who had combined art and theory in their own dissertations and had outstanding experience both in art and in academia.

In that sense [all of my supervisors] have similar backgrounds. (Paula)

In addition, the emphasis of supervision can be on more theoretical and conceptual issues although the person is an artist-researcher with a similar background as is the case in the following quotations:

[My supervisor] is theoretically very strong and orientated and dedicated. For her, it is like fifty-fifty. (Nora)

About the division of work between supervisors, I have two and I've regarded one as being my primary supervisor because she's a doctor and has completed her own artistic research. (...) She supervises more the theoretical part, I've reflected on my thinking and research plan with her. (...) We have a lot in common and everything has worked well and in good spirit and confidence. (Simo)

It seems that particularly those supervisors who have personal experience in artistic doctorates are able to avoid over-theorizing and undue theoretical complexity, which were the main concerns in Hockey's and Allen Collinson's research (2002, p. 346). They claimed that students in art universities may lose confidence in their art-making if the emphasis of the supervision is on theory. My interviewees did not express any anxiety regarding confidence in their artistic work. It was accepted without question that the doctoral project comprised both components, although in official regulations the exact ratio of art and written reflection is not defined.

The majority considered that having two supervisors with different backgrounds was actually rewarding. Thus, the division between theory and art was not necessarily problematic; rather, it was considered valuable to receive feedback from different angles.

[Two supervisors] is a good combination, different perspectives, (...) it has been fruitful. (Jesse)

I get a stronger basis, I think that I've got both directions, it feels really good. (Maria)

They say different things because they are experts from two different fields but the feedback is not contradictory. (Nora)

The changing nature of art professions and the blurring boundaries of different art fields were reflected in the interviews so that respondents expressed a wish to seek guidance outside their own speciality when there was a need to locate their artistic productions in a wider artistic context.

It would be good that two supervisors are different, to balance the situation, one exactly from my own field and the other outside it. (...) I long for a person who is not [from my art field], I wish to expand,

someone who does not necessarily understand the language of [my art field]. (Maria)

Thus, a supervisor who possesses the ability to question and challenge the chosen approach is valued. Sometimes the research question is closely tied to the notion of crossing the borders of a specific art field and therefore a person who is not familiar with the working habits and existing professional discourses of the field is expected to raise issues that help to advance the doctoral project.

She quite quickly challenged me to think about the topic and to ponder if I really wish to take that particular theoretical angle. (Paula)

In Paula's case, supervisors were changed, new experts were added to the team. The change took place amiably and without any controversies. She noted that having three supervisors is a kind of luxury and when the doctoral project is about to be finished, feedback from three keeps the students particularly busy.

X quit [from the supervisor's position] because it was somehow too much of luxury to have three supervisors (...) there was no drama involved. (Paula)

Changing supervisors was very straightforward, and worked for the student's benefit. As Grierson (2012, p. 74) maintains, "changing supervisors is not such an onerous task" and is "an entirely appropriate action". The most important thing is that the supervisory relationship works well and the research advances. The other reason for a change is the variable and unique nature of doctoral projects, which sometimes require ad hoc responses to supervisory situations. (Kroll, 2009, p. 6)

#### 6.4.4 SUPERVISING ARTISTIC PRODUCTIONS

It is interesting to note what varied opinions exist on the amount of supervision during and for art productions. Many respondents noted that they did not expect much supervision regarding the exact content of their artworks and considered that doctoral candidates in art universities work quite independently at realizing their artistic productions. This independence is

taken as a proof of the artistic maturity or professionalism as discussed in these next excerpts.

[The artistic work] is independent, you can ask for advice and the supervisor should approve the productions plan. [My supervisor] has naturally seen but has not supervised them. (...) At this point it is assumed that you're an artist who does not need supervision for his/her art-making.' (Nora)

In particular, during the productions it was quite independent. The supervisor has seen the productions and given professional feedback, what works and what doesn't on an artistic level. (Simo)

One interviewee observed that working independently may be very much an age-related issue. Younger doctoral students with less experience in art-making might really need much more advice.

For Amos, the question of supervising artistic productions was clearly a "mixed blessing". He felt that he had sound professional knowledge of his art field but thought he needed a person with whom ideas could be bounced back and forth. He maintained that sometimes it would be good to have more personal supervision but admitted that supervision is mostly about theoretical issues in the sense of scientific research. He also found this kind of support essential, coming from an art university background.

It might be testing ideas and thoughts, maybe discussions about general methods [of the craft]. (Amos)

Then again, Iris and Erik thought that they needed a view from outside and found their supervisors' comments helpful. Iris presented her work to her supervisor and expected to receive a response but was quite disappointed when, though the supervisor was encouraging, she actually gave very few comments on the content of her work. For Erik, the most important aspect was the research methodology.

With the artistic supervisor, I've tried to show him what I'm doing and I've asked him to watch and listen to my work in progress. He hasn't had a lot to comment on; he has encouraged me, as it should

be – someone should say that this is good. I imagined receiving at least technical supervision. (Iris)

For the artistic part of the research, it is really good to have the view of someone from outside who has knowledge about research methodologies. (...) In that sense supervising artistic research is at some point even more important than supervising the theoretical part. (Erik)

At first, Emma didn't seem to need artistic supervision but when her artistic component underwent major changes after very concrete suggestions from the supervisor, she changed her mind.

I had this fear that someone would poke into my own [artwork], someone who knows better. I kind of thought I didn't need any artistic supervision. Then he gave me concrete feedback on what in his opinion worked and what didn't (...) why a part of it failed and what to do to it. (Emma)

In some instances, the concept of artistic supervision concerns issues other than the content of the artwork, such as production practicalities, facilities, and performance and screening spaces. Students rely on supervisors because there is no other support structures for research-related art productions.

We may talk about the practical work and he may help with the practical arrangements of the productions. (Simo)

For the second [artwork] I asked if my supervisor knew of any premises for the project. (Rosa)

Furthermore, supervisors usually have an understanding of the scope of artistic productions, based on their subjective experiences of artistic doctorates. For example, Erik and Jesse discussed the number of artistic productions with their supervisors who usually commented that the planned number was too high or the scope too extensive. Also, in the process of realizing them, research-related artworks tend to “swell” in size.



[My research] started being very wide and far too big, then little by little it focused. (Erik)

In the first draft of my research plan, I had very many projects as the artistic part. (...) [My supervisor] told me to think again. After the first project, I realized that two to three would make more sense, if I even tried to analyse the material. (Jesse)

The core question is whether supervision is required for art in itself or whether art is supervised within the framework of a research question. As the small-scale exploratory data collected in 2007 (reported in Rinne & Sivenius, 2007) indicated, problems arise if a supervisor with artistic merits has no personal experience in doctoral studies and research processes. He/She may have a limited understanding of the norms, procedures and scholarly community, which often results in he/she giving feedback on the qualities of the artwork rather than focusing on the relationship between the research question and the artwork. One respondent maintained that supervision is meaningful only when it responds to the exact premise of the research, in other words the research question.

The demarcation between the artistic and academic communities is exemplified in situations where artistic supervisors without actual research experience feel inadequate or frustrated because they cannot provide advice on research issues. Sometimes the supervisor is as inexperienced in research as is the student but nonetheless provides valuable support regarding professional problems, ideas and thoughts.

We have discussed it [the artistic part] a bit, rather marginally. I actually asked for supervision because neither of us knew how we should do it. (Amos)

The student may have quite contradictory feelings if the professor nominated for the supervisor's position is undertaking doctoral studies him/herself. This kind of situation might cause friction on both sides and induce tension and is one of the growing pains associated with new disciplines without established canons.

#### 6.4.5 COLLABORATION BETWEEN SUPERVISORS

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, supervisors in art universities are members of two “worlds”, the academic and the artistic. Therefore, it could be assumed that cooperation and communication between two supervisors is crucial when the student is struggling to integrate art and research work. For this reason, in some interviews I briefly asked if the respondents knew about such collaboration or if they had met both their supervisors at the same time, as a supervisory team.

There was no indication of the theory and art supervisors and the student working as a team. Of the ten interviewees, eight had two or three supervisors. For most of the respondents, the lack of communication was not a problem and did not cause any concern. When asked if the two supervisors have been in contact with each other, Nora stated that:

As far as I understand, no, except for the formalities ( ... ) And I've gathered ( ... ) that it is not necessary. (Nora)

There has been no cooperation between supervisors. (Iris)

The contact between them was almost non-existent. Contrary to these experiences, Amos signalled an explicit hope of receiving feedback from both supervisors and thought that such interaction might give rise to fresh insights.

I've never had both supervisors present at the same time. I would like to see how their discussion would benefit my study and would it produce anything, do they speak the same language ( ... ). In an interdisciplinary work like mine this kind of experience would be beneficial (Amos)

The response confirms earlier findings, where it was concluded that supervisors tend to avoid direct contact with each other and prefer to work independently. (Rinne & Sivenius, 2007) Who then is responsible for making the dialogue and cooperation happen? Is it the student, as noted in our earlier study, or is it up to the supervising professor or head of research? Recently at Aalto University, policies have been changed so that each research field has a supervising professor who has overall responsibility for the supervisory arrangements. Two supervisors and a doctoral candidate could

comprise a team where expertise from different fields meets. Not only are the supervisors experts, but when highly motivated mid-career artists (as those interviewed in this study) enter academia they bring along advanced professional experience. It is important for a supervisor to realize that the student is not a beginner but a professional with considerable skills in his/her field. (Kirkkopelto, 2007; Kiljunen & Hannula, 2001, p. 11)

Furthermore, Guerin et al. (2011) note that successful team arrangements “demand significant skill and proactive management from students” (p. 151). Kroll (2009, p. 5) emphasizes the centrality of the team ethos, either in team supervision or by offering external mentorships or establishing support groups. Dissertations integrating art and research require diverse expertise and the principal supervisor has the main responsibility to “juggle the varying perspectives, keeping everyone in the loop and ensuring understanding” (p. 11). An assumption that the supervisor is directing a passive novice is contested when students are more proactive and demonstrate considerable management skills, organizational know-how and good interpersonal skills. In practice-based doctorates, knowledge gained in working life should also be recognized.

Research on team supervision confirms obvious advantages compared with the traditional dyadic model, for instance a team has complementary expertise and offers a diversity of perspectives, especially if the research topic is interdisciplinary (Guerin et al., 2011, p. 138). Although in team supervision the feedback may be conflicting or inconsistent, students respond actively to these and are able to balance differing opinions (p. 147). Each team member needs to foster respectful dialogue and tolerate various paradigms. In Guerin et al.'s study students asked, for example, for simultaneous verbal feedback from all members of the supervisory team in face-to-face meetings.

Many art universities favour the team supervision model. For example, the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden University, advocates a supervisory team which consists of a directing supervisor and one or more specialists for artistic and/or academic supervision. Artistic supervisors are internationally recognized and active artists with knowledge of research in the arts and have a doctoral qualification. The team guarantees that the candidate has a proper balance of artistic work, research, and theoretical and practical aspects.<sup>54</sup>

54 Retrieved November 11, 2011 from <http://www.phdarts.eu/supervision>

#### 6.4.6 SUPERVISING THE COMBINATION

If team arrangements are rare, how then can the integration between artistic work, written reflection and conceptual understanding be achieved? Artistic work seems to be mostly independent and not often discussed with supervisors and the focus of supervision is often, at least at the beginning, on theoretical issues. Regardless of what we mean when we talk about a combination of art and theory, support is required when intertwining the threads of the written thesis and artworks.

Because of the evolving conceptions about the role of artwork in research and what artistic research in general is about, the need to seek support emerged when experiences of art-making were brought back into the research context and the whole structure of research was tackled. The versatile approaches to building these connections have already been explained. The stage when doctoral candidates seek advice from their supervisors is demanding. For some, the combination seems to relate mostly to the question of research methodology.

[After productions] I asked to meet my supervisor and we examined the situation together. (Paula)

Afterwards I'm quite willing to hear feedback but mostly on methods and about how to obtain answers to my research questions. (...) I long for a person who knows about the structures of research, of such systems. (Maria)

It is important to have a supervisor who knows about the research methodology. When I started to lose the connection [between art and theory] I contacted my supervisor for assistance. She has this kind of understanding. (Erik)

Previously it was noted that production work is so intensive and time-consuming that there is a risk of losing reference to the research approach of the dissertation. Here the supervisor's contribution was essential: he/she should remind the student that the artistic project is part of a whole and keep pointing out the importance of the research question in relation to the artistic production. One respondent thought that she did not receive any supervision regarding these problems.

To have a supervisor who would have reminded me all the time that this [artwork] is part of your dissertation. (...) An ideal situation would have been that there had been such a supervisor who would've advised on the methods of artistic research. (Emma)

Students need to explicate this connection in both scholarship applications and research plans and in the presentation texts that are submitted to those who pre-examine artistic productions. Maria reiterated the view according to which art projects produced knowledge and were, at the same time, a methodological vehicle for research. She felt that she received extremely helpful advice from her supervisor who had undertaken an artistic doctorate and tackled similar questions.

We have planned how to connect everything to theory, or to the thinking. (...) She has experience, she has gone through the process. (Maria)

In the few studies undertaken on doctorates in art universities, it has been found that the greatest challenge for a supervisor is to get the balance between art and theory right. Hockey and Allen Collinson (2002, pp. 346–351) suggest that the supervisor should try to make students understand that analytical experience is meaningful for an artist, that is, to emphasize the similarities between the artistic and scientific processes, and to stress that both art and scientific thinking require creativity. According to Simmons et al. (2008, p. 19), students of fine arts face a paradigm shift, and forces them to seek to place the responsibility on the supervisor, therefore “setting up a high degree of dependence for everything but the art” (p. 18). The supervisor’s main task and talent in creative disciplines is to aid in research methodology, which, according to their view, consists of the theory-practice nexus. Further, Kroll (2009) describes the supervisor’s role as being one that aids in “this volatile, dialectical process, ‘research cycle,’ or research loop, which occurs throughout the candidature” (p. 11).

It was considered essential that the supervisor be an active artist-researcher and that intertwining art and research is an important starting point for his/her own work and that he/she has comprehensively internalized the problems associated with research activities in art universities. Paula and Maria said that their supervisors, who were two of the first art university doctoral graduates in Finland, had this kind of competence.

What I wanted and thought was necessary was to hear how [one of my supervisors] articulates [my research question] more from the point of view of the academic tradition without losing the point of view of practice-based research. (Paula)

I send her the text and she goes through it and makes detailed comments. (...) She doesn't take the text too literally, which I find very good, but gives her opinion on the text, this is just what I wish for. (Maria)

They felt that they received support on every aspect of research: the theoretical points of view, the art projects and the connection between the two. This was also one of the characteristics students consider most valuable in supervisors: expertise related to knowledge of the structures and processes of artistic research.

A supervisor should know about the research process because, particularly in the beginning, it is so disorganized. (Iris)

A supervisor should have personal experience of the ups and downs of research so that he/she knows and can see when I'm lost. (Jesse)

Experienced (...) and I find it very essential that one of them has gone through the process. (Maria)

This notion is similar to the result obtained by Neumann (2003) when she found that doctoral students wish to work “with fellow artists who were also academics”, and with those who are “knowledgeable in the craft as well as in the requisite academic framework for the development of their ideas” (p. 45). In other words, a significant amount of expertise is expected from supervisors in art universities. According to Kroll (2009), multitasking supervisors should be “as informed and proactive as those guiding the career of elite athletes” (p. 1).

#### 6.4.7 VALUED QUALITIES

At the end of each interview, I asked respondents to list five characteristics of a good supervisor. The idea was to elicit more talk on supervision and to determine if the interviewees paid more attention to traits related to

expertise or to more personal features. From the above, it can be concluded that personal experience in undertaking an artistic doctorate is considered crucial. Other appreciated features were an ability to make students confront and reconsider ideas, and to encourage the students' thinking processes instead of expecting that the student shares the supervisor's trains of thought. The respondents find it inappropriate if a supervisor forces a student to conform to his/her ideas.

Capable of confronting ideas, turning them upside down, manages to make you reconsider your ideas. (Erik)

How to give space to a student to make his/her own decisions, (...) not to impose a certain standpoint or his/her own agenda. (Simo)

To give space and have patience not to feed his/her own thoughts and opinions. (Paula)

Not to draw his/her own line in a goal-oriented way, an ability to adjust to another person's situation. (Maria)

In general, when you teach art you should not force your own views on your students. So I think supervisors should not expect that students share their ways of thinking. (Iris)

Supervisors should encourage students to acknowledge failure, that is, to make brave decisions and experiment with alternative ways of making, but, at the same time have respect for the student's own starting points. Mistakes, rather than perfect outcomes, if treated properly as research findings, push the research forward.

A thorough interest in the research topic was also one of the characteristics valued by many. As the comments below demonstrate, genuine interest does not necessarily require direct expertise in the field.

A supervisor should be really interested in the research, this is primary for me. (...) Although he/she has not totally mastered the field but is interested and willing to find out about it, to get the idea. (Nora)

Genuinely interested in the topic and enough expertise, on the one hand, but an ability to see things more widely, on the other. (Amos)

Knowledgeable, knows about the topic. (Erik)

According to Simmons et al. (2008), the problems faced during the doctoral journey have to do with supervisors who do not know enough about the area of the student's research. The above remarks confirm that this notion was also central for my interviewees.

Strictness and a precise attitude were also appreciated as these gave students a secure feeling and the confidence that their doctoral projects were proceeding well and being carried out correctly, and that the quality of the work is good.

Both of my supervisors are very strict which is good for me, it makes me feel secure, but at the same time imposes pressures. (Nora)

What I appreciate is that he/she is pretty strict, not unnecessarily critical, but he/she can advise me as to which direction to proceed. (Jesse)

Challenges me so that he/she does not accept just anything, strict in the sense that he/she urges me to see that this is serious and needs to be rethought. (Paula)

Accuracy, for example in reading texts. (Simo)

Rosa captured the importance of encouragement when she stated that for her the concept of supervision is mostly about her supervisor being enthusiastic about her work and that she finds her research topic relevant. She said that:

the greatest supervision has been the enthusiasm shown and the fact that [the supervisor] finds my work so relevant. The feedback has been extremely important. (Rosa)

Also, respondents find it negative if a supervisor uses the student as a stepping stone for his/her own career. They consider it ethically wrong for



a supervisor to supervise for his/her own good, to have a large number of supervisees as a demonstration of his/her qualification.

It's an ethical point also, not to use the student as a stepping stone for your own career. (Simo)

Supervision shouldn't only be a merit, a demonstration that I've got that many supervisees. (Amos)

The interviewees mentioned also some personal characteristics, such as motivation, being encouraging, inspiring and supportive, having good communication skills and networks. Having similar personal styles, being mutually respectful and sharing a similar sense of humour were also thought to be important.

Rosa emphasized that the starting point for authentic communication in a supervisory situation is the absence of any hierarchy, so that the student and the supervisor are on the same level. Simo and Amos underlined the importance of a confidential relationship and respect and the fact that the supervisor has time for them.

Regarding the closeness of the relationship with the supervisor, most interviewees chose to keep it on a subject-orientated basis. No close relationships were expected to develop, neither were supervisors expected to become personal friends.

Supervision is personal for myself and I fear that the relationship with the other supervisor will remain distant. (Nora)

Sometimes you'll need a shoulder to lean on but this is the same as in child rearing, [it is important] also to give room for experimentation. (Jesse)

You can take a beer [with your supervisor] but not become personal friends. I don't actually think it would be appropriate. (Amos)

Thus, doctoral students seem to wish to keep the supervisory relationship focused on the research topic rather than developing it into a liaison between friends, as was also concluded in the study of Simmons et al. (2008, p. 12) Obviously and as in every interpersonal relationship, respect, trust,

motivation and support were mentioned. Knowledge of the research topic is again of great importance as is the ability to challenge arguments and idea development. These attributes were also found in Denicolo's (2004, pp. 703–4) study on colleague supervision.

#### 6.4.8 UNSTRUCTURED AND UNPROBLEMATIC

I conclude this examination by presenting the practicalities of how supervision is carried out and discussing some findings from the earlier research literature that might explain the unproblematic and unstructured nature of supervision in the two art universities examined in this study. Two surveys (International Postgraduate Students Mirror, 2006, pp. 63, 70; Sainio, 2010) indicated that only 49% of doctoral students in the arts and humanities were satisfied with the amount of supervision they received and, in Finland, the responses concerning the dialogue with supervisors were the least positive.<sup>55</sup> In the latter study, only one third of recent PhD graduates and Doctors of Art reported having received an adequate amount of supervisory support for their studies (p. 94). In light of these studies, I assumed that I would receive quite critical comments.

However, the interviews reveal that the practicalities of supervision were mutually agreed upon and the students were quite satisfied with their supervisors. Supervision was usually carried out in good spirit and with confidence. There were no major complaints or negative comments and the actual supervisory practices did not give rise to strong emotions. For example, getting an appointment was easy and there were no notions of supervisors' busy schedules. Only one respondent mentioned that he had difficulties in the beginning. Otherwise supervisors agreed to meet whenever they were approached. Generally, students contact supervisors when required, when a question arises. Thus, supervision is carried out on the basis of the students' needs.

I 'booked' a supervisory meeting and received one and then we again looked at where we're going. (Paula)

It seems, however, that doctoral students meet their supervisors quite

55 The three other studied countries were Sweden, Catalonia (Spain) and Ireland.

rarely. The intervals between meetings may be very long, for example Emma met her supervisor only once a year, Nora had similar experiences.

We met only a couple of times, I haven't met her often. (Nora)

There was up to a year interval [between the meetings]. (Emma)

Amos explained that he was supervised as part of a group at the beginning. The problem was that the research topics differed quite a lot and he received support only on the methodological side of the thesis.

There was little personal supervision. (Amos)

In-between the face-to-face meetings, contact takes place via e-mails. She commented by e-mail on my writing. (Nora)

He sent his comments to me by e-mail which was good. (Iris)

Iris raised the importance of the student's proactive role in supervisory situations. She pointed out that the student has responsibility to contact the supervisor, too, and report on his/her activities. Simo regularly sent reports to his supervisor and explained what he was doing at the particular time.

It [supervision] is an interactive process, I have to ask, I think it is also my responsibility. (Iris)

I've given my supervisor reports saying, I'm doing this and that, or when I need to update my research plan. (Simo)

In addition to the above, there seems to be a need to be advised on research management, to receive practical tips such as road maps and information on best practices as well on the different guidelines and specificities of the artistic research process. These topics are discussed both with supervisors and with peers.

I asked many questions on her own research process, how it had progressed. (...) I was interested in it as an example because she had

clearly undertaken an artistic research project. (...) What kind of feedback and response she received. (Maria)

There could have been more advice on the [research] process. (Iris)

How the pre-examination goes and other practices. (Simo)

In the study of Simmons et al. (2008), the experiences of doctoral students reveal that supervisors have a central role in informing students of university guidelines, policies and practices, as well as giving practical guidance on managing research. They conclude that the responsibilities and roles of supervisors were more related to management tasks than expectations regarding scholarly practice. Also, Kuusi (2012, p. 17) determined that in art universities doctoral candidates need support with the dissertation process as a whole.

On the basis of my observations made while working with doctoral students of art and design, the frequency of meetings seems to depend on the phase of the research. At the beginning of the project, when the research proposal is being fine-tuned, students meet their supervisors quite often. After the initial stage of enthusiasm, the communication usually decreases. Contacts increase again when the manuscript is nearing completion, the final stage is intense and requires a lot of work and predetermined schedules. The institutional requirement for a supervisor's statement when submitting the manuscript for pre-examination intensifies the interaction. This is in line with the results of the above-mentioned survey: the planning stage and initiation into research procedures require extensive contact and, towards the end of the relationship, this increases again. (International Postgraduate Students Mirror, 2006, p. 67) An Australian survey (Cullen et al., 1994, p. 82) supports these findings and no significant variation was found between disciplines.<sup>56</sup>

It appears that although the students meet their supervisors quite infrequently, the work is carried out in a supportive spirit. The interviews refer to collaboration and the absence of hierarchy.

I have a very pleasant relationship with my supervisor, it is very equal, a relationship from which each feels they are receiving something. (Rosa)

56 See, also, Theatre Academy's 2011 Postgraduate Guide (pp. 26–27).

Everything has worked out very well (...) we teach together (...) we have taped our discussions, it [supervision] has been a very shared experience. (Maria)

Also, as Iris's comments demonstrate, working with a supervisor with a university background and a long-standing work history at art university went very well. Students seem to appreciate a relationship based on collegiality.

He has followed my thinking and I've written essays, he knows what I think and encourages my own thinking [in my thesis]. (...) My approach is quite philosophical, so I need philosophical concepts. (Iris)

The above remarks demonstrate that equal supervisory practices are beneficial both to the student and the supervisor. Cooperation may be epitomized by joint teaching assignments or co-authored articles. Both student and supervisor gain knowledge, it is a two-way process, an equal partnership. The collaborative nature of the supervisory relationship where seeking and exploring are carried out together is well suited to the process of knowledge production in art universities. (Evans & Gandolfo, 2009, pp. 2, 13) This approach, which can be regarded as teamwork, encourages commitment and creates an open and confident atmosphere. During the doctoral process, the relationship develops from a hierarchical professor-student relationship into a reciprocal colleague-colleague relationship. (Aittola, 1995)

The impression of the unstructured and unproblematic nature of the supervisory relationship in the interviews can also be understood in terms of collegiality or partnership. Denicolo (2004) addresses the term colleague supervision meaning "the situation in which an academic has the formal support responsibility for a colleague undertaking a higher degree by research" (p. 693). Although Denicolo writes about academics holding multiple roles (teacher, administrator, researcher, mentor) and how the nature of these roles changes when put in the context of doctoral supervision, her notion on collegiality is an apt description of the supervision of doctorates in art universities. Most doctoral students already have established careers and, when the supervisor has a similar background, the relationship is more likely to be that of colleagues than any other more traditional model of learning where a hierarchy is expected.

Colleague supervision requires specific skills and includes the

possibilities of conflict if and when the student's expertise eventually exceeds that of the supervisor (Denicolo, 2004, p. 696), a point discreetly raised in one interview. ten Brink (2008, p. 42) has also noted that supervisors of interdisciplinary or practice-based research should be able to accept that eventually the student will become the expert in her/his field and know more than the supervisor.

In parallel with colleague supervision, supervision of artistic productions resembles perhaps more coaching or mentoring than supervision. The required qualities of supervision and mentoring do overlap (Kroll, 2009, p. 7); mentoring operates on many different levels, but it mostly means support for personal and intellectual development and career planning. (Pearson & Brew, 2002, p. 141) It is especially valuable in underpinning the emotional dimension of research; thus, mentoring implies a more personal and trusting relationship between a supervisor and a doctoral candidate. (Kroll, 2009, p. 7)<sup>57</sup>

In earlier research, the distinction between independence and pastoral care was conceptualized by Gurr (2001, p. 86), meaning the balance between how much the supervisor gives and how much is expected from the student. During the doctoral journey, the development towards autonomy requires more a hands-off approach, where supervisors do not direct or intervene but rely on the candidate's independence and ability to undertake research. (Kroll, 2009, p. 5) Hands-off supervision is appropriate for those who have a high level of competence, such as career professionals, which is the case in this study. The opposite is hands-on supervision which, according to Sinclair (2004, pp. vi-vii, 13), is common in the hard sciences where supervisors lead structured research teams that interact on an almost daily basis and have strict deadlines.

In the end, each doctoral candidate is responsible for his/her research. Simmons et al. (2008) ask: "At what point does dependence on support and guidance from a supervisor give way to independence and the candidate's ownership of their research? In other words, when does the adventure

57 The difference between supervisors and mentors is their official status vis-à-vis the university. Mentors are usually an addition to formal supervision, external to the university. At the Australian Flinders University, the mentoring programme has been established in creative writing to help with the doctoral candidates' artistic projects. The experiences are encouraging "allowing candidates to view their work from the perspective of someone highly regarded in the literary community" (Kroll, 2009, p. 13). Mentoring also acts as a collaborative alternative without compromising artistic autonomy.

begin?” (p. 14). The interview data demonstrate that these questions are not very relevant in the art university context. Students are autonomous and used to directing their own work. Usually and because of the unique and innovative research topics, the development process of becoming a researcher in art is a solitary pursuit and ensuring successful completion requires mediation and collaboration from several directions, not least from within the research community.

Mediators, whether professors, supervisors, peers or significant others, are the cornerstones of research communities. Supervisory activities are either burdened or enriched by the current situation in which these forms of research are still evolving. One of the burdens is the notion of the heredity of supervision, that is, how a person supervises is dependent on what kind of supervision he/she has received. (Aittola, 1995, pp. 163, 180) The rationale is that “it worked for me, so it will work for my students” (Grant, 2005, p. 3). In other words, many supervisors bring their own experiences of being supervised and model their own supervisor when they set an agenda for supervision (Hill, 2011, p. 157), which poses challenges for supervision in emerging disciplines.

As indicated before, when art universities started doctoral programmes, supervisors came from neighbouring disciplines and apparently had no personal experience in integrating art and research. Overcoming the question of heredity is one of the issues that requires time to be resolved. Since one of the most valued attributes of a supervisor is the personal experience of having passed through the process, trusting the level of expertise of art universities’ “own graduates” and nominating them in supervisory positions appears to be of great importance not only to the contribution of knowledge of their shared field but to the research culture in general. Again, time and patience are needed when the practices within the new field of research are taking shape.

## 6.5 Significant others as mediators

### 6.5.1 PEERS, COLLEAGUES, FAMILIES

The interview responses demonstrate that, in addition to official arrangements such as supervision, doctoral candidates depend on a range of others when working towards doctoral degrees. This section provides another angle of support and discusses those groups that matter in the overall doctoral experience and contribute to the advancement of respondents' research by giving feedback and practical advice. Peers, colleagues, fellow artists and doctoral candidates, reading groups and family members constitute an essential addition to the available mediational means.

It is essential for students to receive support from different people and from varying angles and directions, because research topics are unique and positioned between diverse disciplines and art fields. With colleagues, it is easy to talk about emotional ups and downs, share experiences and realize that doing research is not easy for anyone. Fellow doctoral candidates face similar problematic situations and undergo the same struggles and are therefore one of the central sources of peer support. Inspiring discussions may also concern issues related to the practicalities of research.

A really good team spirit has been developed here. Although we have people from different art fields we share practical advice almost every day. How to do references, opinions about certain headings, etc. (Simo)

We have an artist-researcher community where the atmosphere is really good and spontaneous and peer support invaluable. We talk mostly during informal coffee breaks. Doing research is not easy and it is good to be aware that although the topics are different the problems are quite similar. Collegial support is more emotional and unreserved (...) and responds to different needs than supervisory support. (Nora)

These comments add further weight to Hopwood et al.'s (2011, p. 223) conclusion that students do not necessarily share emotional experiences with their supervisors but confide more willingly in their peers. Emotions are more or less worked through with friends and peers. Additionally, the



recent study by Lahenius (2013) confirms this view: “Peer students as a source of support has been almost unnoticed by the faculties” (p. 14).

The feedback received from fellow artist-researchers and members of artistic teams appeared relevant in situations where not much supervisory advice was expected on the process and content of the artworks. In a way, peer support substitutes for the meagre supervisory advice. Artistic teams constitute an invaluable and essential source of support and the significance of artistic teams is emphasized in several interviews. In the audiovisual field, for example, producers read and comment on draft scripts and other colleagues provide advice on various versions. This normal professional practice transfers smoothly from the artistic environment into an academic context and is an example of the fading boundaries between art and academia.

I have asked several people to watch and it is easier to find colleagues for that. (Emma)

I’ve been working with a friend with whom I used to [do artistic work], (...) I’m sending him material to get his opinion. I’ve been thinking if it is possible to integrate some of these comments into my research. (Erik)

Interviewees pointed out that art projects are realized in teams and an artist-researcher cannot entirely determine the project beforehand, but has to take into account the artistic views of the other team members.<sup>58</sup> A group with a high level of familiarity with one another is usually considered to be more desirable as it can anticipate how key artistic ideas develop.

It is also important that the same team works in consecutive productions. Erik emphasized that the success of artistic teams depends very much on chemistry.

Chemistry (...) is always a plus but not in the same way as in an [artistic] group where it is very essential. In research, you always have a

58 According to the Aalto regulations, artistic components “can be joint productions or projects, provided that the independent contribution of the doctoral candidate can be clearly indicated.” Retrieved August 7, 2014 from <https://into.aalto.fi/display/endoctoraltaik/Dissertation+and+Graduation>.

framework and certain aims that provide a basis for the work, framing and delineating the communication. (Erik)

I receive feedback from my artistic team, it helps with the artistic development. (...) They value it highly but essentially they are not familiar with [research]. We indeed share the authorship in many artistic choices. (...) We had worked together earlier and that is very important. I don't want to monopolize the group but to negotiate about [the art production] with the group. (Maria)

Doctoral students convene in research seminars, which constitute another major component of peer support; this helps in understanding the working habits of academic communities. These events are useful, for instance, when preparing for conferences.

The department's research seminar has been very good and active, I've presented a conference paper and we have discussed it. (Paula)

The majority of interviewees participated in a structured doctoral programme where various workshops are organized regularly.

All the structured activities, such as research presentations, articles, seminars and conference presentations, force you to structure your thoughts. In retrospect, they have been quite excellent, similar to milestones which always encapsulate [thinking] and take it [research] to another level. (Simo)

We met at least once every two months. (...) We planned activities and, in summer, we had a reading group and also wrote texts, the support from the group has been very good, in many directions and on many levels. (Paula)

These programmes are usually based on the recent trend of interdisciplinarity. Researchers' heterogeneous backgrounds and the variety of research topics are expected to give rise to innovations. (Krause et al., 2009, p. 150) Nevertheless, finding a common language and understanding appeared to be complicated because the research questions and themes vary extensively.

In some interviews, the current trend and quest for interdisciplinarity was discussed and some found it difficult to tackle.

If I have to be honest I really think I'm not sure it [the research programme] is such a positive mix in terms of efficiency (...) We dealt with topics that were quite different from each other. (...) When, someone is talking about the theme that is related to my field I listen more carefully, they are using language I can relate to but when someone is talking about [some other field] I don't even know what they are talking about. (Erik)

I felt it was quite difficult although interdisciplinary and 'inter-artistry' is a subject much talked about. (...) We ponder the same research question, you receive comments across the board, it requires a lot of understanding. (Amos)

However, these programmes functioned meticulously, it was obligatory to present the work regularly. Deadlines aided in keeping the projects on track and advanced the doctoral work. Encouragement, practical tips and instructions were received and welcomed.

[Participation] in a research group provides a structure, being in the same group that draws up schedules is very helpful because you keep yourself involved in the research, (...) it helps to crystallize and concretize. (Amos)

Maria was working as part of a specific research group at the very beginning of her studies and considered the experience very important and helpful. Being a member of a research community at an early stage of her candidature assisted her particularly in figuring out the structural elements of her research.

It was a very good experience, very important, I learnt a lot and in a very short time. I was introduced into a research community and structure. (Maria)

There are both advantages and disadvantages to be gained from experiences in interdisciplinary research communities. For Erik, it was difficult to

engage fully in his scholarly community. As Amos stated, interdisciplinarity increases the requirements for understanding the varying research traditions and processes.

Interdisciplinarity may be problematic but sharing views on art projects with fellow doctoral candidates generally produced quite positive experiences. Some interviewees participated in organized group discussions on the ongoing artistic productions, gave and received feedback and instructions, and views and opinions.

Then we had this informal discussion group for those who have artistic productions as part of their theses, the idea was that those who had ongoing productions talked and shared their thoughts either during the process or after it. We shared experiences, this was peer support at its best. (Simo)

Theoretical skills are also gained in reading groups, either together with supervisors or with fellow doctoral students. Jesse, Iris and Paula mentioned participation in such groups as a resource during their doctoral process.

With my theory supervisor, we cooperate closely within a reading group and meet when the group meets. This project is not directly but rather tangentially related to my research. (Jesse)

I've participated in this reading group, it has been excellent and has forced me to read a lot of philosophy (...) it has been extremely helpful. There has been a sort of research atmosphere there and I find it quite fascinating. (Iris)

We established, together with my colleagues, a reading group, with those who dealt with similar topics. (Paula)

Last but not least, support from families was raised in the interviews. Those respondents clearly expressed that they were mavericks working mostly alone and seemed to rely on their families for support. Interviewees frequently discussed their research with their partners, some of whom were also preparing their own dissertations.

I share these methodological discussions with my wife, we talk pretty much about different concepts, what they mean in my research and what in hers, (...) how practice and theory are intertwined. (Amos)

For Amos, the methodological and conceptual discussions were particularly noteworthy and rewarding. Being in a similar position as his partner was clearly helpful and contributed to his work. Others also mentioned family members as being among those who had an impact on their works.

The above views on the importance of peers was also demonstrated in earlier research. Students acquire knowledge from peers and others when interacting with colleagues and trying to make sense of scholarly work and values. (Austin, 2011, p. 12; Pearson & Brew, 2002, p. 141) Kroll (2009, p. 14) maintains that fellow doctoral students coach and provide sounding-boards for one another. In an informal group, it is possible to exchange information, test ideas, receive immediate feedback, share the highs and lows and get comfort for the moments of uncertainty. Likewise, Kiljunen and Hannula (2001, p. 12) emphasize the significance of mutual support, interaction and pondering of research themes within a certain research community, in this case the art university context. In the British survey on Research Training in the Creative & Performing Arts & Design (2001, pp. 26–27), the relevance of the research community was strongly emphasized. The need for dialogue, opportunities for debate with people sympathetic to and knowledgeable about practice and particularly its place in research were highly valued.

In her recent dissertation, Stubb (2012, pp. 3–4) writes about the importance of community in the doctoral journey and maintains that learning is an active and socially mediated process and is dependent on the support of others. The experience of belonging to communities of scientific practice is central and support is sought from faculty, peers and family members. The academic communities share common tools such as outspoken paradigms and discourses but also tacit knowledge on scholarly habits and working methods. In addition, socialization is a two-way process, where newcomers also mould the practices and culture of their communities. (p. 5)

The findings of this study confirm that the importance of peers in the experience and development of the doctoral process is usually underestimated. Students' accounts, interactions and mediational means ought to be examined because students themselves actively shape their experiences and outcomes. (Hopwood, 2010b, p. 830) It seems that peer support is not recognized officially, simply because it is too self-evident. Further, Borgdorff

(2012) maintains that “emphasizing the importance of the artistic-researcher as part of a community of peers would greatly benefit the emerging field of artistic research” (p. 7).

From the above experiences it can be concluded that doctoral students are relationally agentic, interviewees recognize and rely on a wide range of significant sources, networks or other people as resources. Relational agency means “a capacity to align one’s thoughts and actions with those of others to interpret aspects of one’s world and to act on and respond to those interpretations” (Edwards, 2007, p. 4). Relational agency is not the same as collaboration or teamwork, but rather, an ability to recognize reciprocal competencies within communities and how different networks of expertise contribute to the achievement of goals. Expertise is distributed outside an individual mind, and represented in both material and representational cultural tools. (p. 5)

Although formal teaching and mentoring schemes and arrangements are important, unexpected experiences and spontaneous interactions are also crucial. (Hopwood, 2010b, p. 838) There is a discrepancy between the official view of supervision and everyday experience. When doctorates are seen as end products in the knowledge economy, the bottom-up view is ignored. “The doctorate is navigated and negotiated by students according to their own agency, ambitions and needs, which are often distinct from those aired in the policy environments” (p. 840).

The power of community is very much emphasized in Boon’s (2013) recent research. She concludes: “A PhD program is best delivered by a range of people, not just the advisor (supervisor)” (p. 13). Contextual factors and research culture, including colleagues, administrators and physical working spaces, have great influence on the doctoral experience. This culture includes research administrators and their contribution to the context of the doctoral experience when working in close collaboration with professors and supervisors.

#### 6.5.2 THE POWER OF THE GROUP

As described above, four of the respondents were interviewed for a second time. At the time of the first interview, one of them had started her doctoral studies 1.5 years earlier and was chosen to be part of the newly established programme of artist-researchers, which also guaranteed funding for her studies. We discussed, among other things, her expectations for the

programme. After two years, I interviewed her again. The purpose was to highlight how the programme met her expectations and to demonstrate the quite novel working methods that had emerged during those two years.

In the preceding section, I discussed the relevance of peers to the doctoral experience. In the performing arts and in film, artists are used to working in groups that share working habits and also often know each other personally. In artistic research, doctoral students function quite independently and the collective dimensions of research, for example in terms of working in groups with joint research projects, seem to be missing. It resembles the individualistic research culture of the arts and humanities. According to Hakkarainen et al. (2013) intensive participation in research laboratory work and co-authoring journal articles with supervisors and other senior researchers is a common working method in the natural sciences and in medicine. In the natural sciences, more collaborative working methods dominate and in the social sciences, the research culture is a blend of the two. (Sinclair, 2004, p. vi)

When we met for the first time, one particular interviewee had just heard that she had passed the rigorous selection process and had been nominated as one of six doctoral candidates. Her enthusiasm was evident in the interview:

I'm so incredibly enthusiastic. (...) This is just what I've been wishing for and this has to do with how different art fields cooperate, we really make art and workshops together.

Her remarks demonstrate that by managing to get this position, her earlier uncertainties vanished and the direction of the research is much clearer. It seems to be a new start, something to look forward to, her own path to follow.

Yes, now this [research] starts for real. Thus far I've wondered if this is the right direction, where do I find my own community, what is my position in this whole and suddenly everything falls into place.

Not even the set time constraints and expected completion of studies in four years seemed to cause her any concern. The programme management has obviously placed great emphasis on timely completion.

I need to graduate in four years, it sets into motion a different drive. As I have a monthly salary I can just concentrate for once. (...) But, earlier I drew up a strict schedule for myself and thought that if I got funding, I really could make it.

Her expectations concerned both the theoretical issues and possibilities of realizing art productions together with other artist-researchers. Like-mindedness and mutual understanding were valuable features in this new community.

It is so interesting what will happen, I know that we realize side by side our own artworks but we will surely do something together, we understand each other's situations so well. (...) I expect a lot of new areas of study, I plan to embrace the history and theory of artistic research.

After two years, having accumulated some experience with the working habits of the group, the second interview took place. It seemed that many of her expectations had been fulfilled. She considered it valuable that the members of the groups were involved in similar situations and faced identical problems although they represented different art fields. Despite the current trend of breaking boundaries between fields, each has its own strong traditions. In addition, the degree requirements in member universities differ, some place more emphasis on artistic work while others stress the dialogue between art and written reflection.

Particularly in research environments, you can still stumble onto these barriers [between art fields].

Building group cohesion from the start was demanding. In a new programme, very practical issues, such as working methods and structures and where participating students were situated, had to be tackled. Students were allowed to decide for themselves the most convenient practices, for instance they were asked to jointly think over how to arrange the obligatory studies so that they were the most helpful for all involved. Initially, no time for planning was reserved but the students requested it and the steering group agreed.



The beginning was pretty distressing, how do we act, the group was unbalanced in terms of where people are [situated] (...) This led to a need to organize the group.

One of the central aims of this programme is to develop novel and collaborative modes and procedures for artist-researchers. This was accomplished and in the interviewee's opinion, it was one of the best features of the programme. Collaboration concerned both art projects and writing exercises. In the former, traditional roles and responsibilities were questioned and students experimented with diverse group approaches. It was challenging to match both art and research perspectives in these exercises. She spoke quite persuasively about this:

There seems to be four energy fields and we all pull strongly towards the centre, towards each other. Sometimes we encounter strong, not necessarily conflicts, but feelings such as I don't understand that at all, or he/she doesn't get what I'm doing.

Furthermore, the group generated innovative methods for writing. The traditional ways of academic publishing were tested when the group decided to write a peer-reviewed article together which is not in itself new but the structure of the article was rethought.

We planned to write together an article that would have a joint beginning and end but [in-between] would divide into four strands. You can read it either from one point of view or as a whole article.

The students of the funded programmes are expected to report regularly about their progress to their programme's steering committee. Because the yearly reports are quite frivolous and usually list only how each doctoral student has progressed that year, students initiated a more comprehensive summary of output on the research topic and artwork.

Because the yearly reports are quite superficial, about what you have done, etc., we planned that we would also do a sort of catalogue where each one of us clarifies his/her own research topic and artwork (...) and further develops these into a publication.

The significance of peer support was emphasized, helping each other was expected which also paved the way for understanding different research approaches and the problems of fellow doctoral students.

We have helped each other. (...) We cooperate all the time, think jointly about how to organize seminars. (...) We brainstorm, and think this and that could be possible.

In this programme, truly collaborative working methods are developed, reminiscent of those in the natural sciences, with one exception: doctoral students are allowed to work freely together, in the spirit of an artistic community and without so much support or back-up from either their supervisor or from those steering the programme. The knowledge-creating agency, to paraphrase Hakkarainen et al.'s (2013, pp. 1–2) concept, is fairly independent of those guiding the research. Students tackle shared research problems by themselves but these are not related to their supervisor's research endeavours. Article-based dissertations are not at stake here, but rather jointly conducted art projects and project-related shared reflections. The new doctoral programme tries to challenge the conventional humanities paradigm of a sole researcher and introduce the performing and audiovisual arts tradition of collective work into the academic context. Such an environment is obviously beneficial to the development of the research field in its entirety.

## 6.6 Material mediating activities

### 6.6.1 NECESSARY TOOLS FOR ARTISTIC PRODUCTIONS AND PEER INTERACTION: RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

Prophet (2004) maintains that practice-based research has developed during the last decades with virtually no decent infrastructural support. Universities have not managed to invest resources in the development of the research infrastructure and artists have carried out their artworks in their own studios with their own materials. The situation differs from other scientific fields, with laboratories “funded, maintained and stocked” (p. 3)

by higher education institutions, research councils and other external funding bodies.

Research infrastructure<sup>59</sup> means those tools, equipment, materials, data sets and services that facilitate research and strengthen research capacities. It includes resources that support organized research and permit developmental activities. Infrastructure can be single-sited or distributed, depending on the research field.<sup>60</sup> It is not only a mediational tool in research but is firmly connected to the academic division of labour and responsibilities in a given research community.

In artistic research, various mediational and material tools are needed for realizing research-related productions and projects. Artistic work requires studio space, equipment and technical support, both to carry out experimentation and to complete ongoing projects. How easy or difficult it is for a doctoral candidate to obtain them is a very fundamental question of research infrastructure. Both universities examined in this study have separate units for production facilities that serve both the basic and doctoral levels of education.<sup>61</sup> Obviously, art forms differ in their dependence on facilities and equipment, a musician's need is not the same as that of a sculptor. Performing and audiovisual arts today are quite dependent on technology, film requires facilities and devices, such as cameras, audio and lighting equipment, and editing units.

Lebow (2008) has surveyed the needs of doctoral students in film and writes that half of the interviewees indicated that the technical support was

59 Definition of research infrastructure, Academy of Finland. Retrieved October 28, 2012 from <http://www.aka.fi/en-GB/A/Programmes-and-cooperation/Research-infrastructure-funding/> and Humanities of European Research Area. Retrieved October 28, 2012 from [www.heranet.info](http://www.heranet.info).

60 In the humanities, the research infrastructure includes also collections, catalogues, indexes and databases. Technical instruments and audiovisual laboratories are examples of experimental facilities. Digital resources comprise digitized artefacts and texts, sound and film.

61 Aalto University's Department of Film, Scenography and Television is located at the national education, research and development centre Lume (Media Centre Lume), which has facilities and equipment for audiovisual productions. Lume's mission has been to facilitate practice-based research and experimental productions by offering a testbed "in which theoretical studies can be seamlessly connected with empirical research, where innovations are put into practice. Professional film and TV studios also welcome research groups, while editing, sound and postproduction suites are also available" (Eskelinen, 2005, p. 6). At the Theatre Academy, the training theatre Teakon, a performance and technology unit, is available both to undergraduate and doctoral students. Retrieved August 6, 2014 from <http://www.teakon.fi/tieto2.html>.

inadequate, meaning both technical instruction and access to equipment. Many artists have to use their own equipment simply because academic institutions cannot always offer those to doctoral projects. The other half failed to answer the question and Lebow concludes that this is “due to the fact that some of the students were practitioners prior to entering the academy for their PhD studies, and thus had all of the equipment and training necessary” (p. 209). In Finland, having one’s own equipment has not been very common but with advances in digital technology, new low-cost tools and devices are within the reach of doctoral students. Iris was self-sufficient, had her own technical equipment and was only marginally dependent on the support facilities provided by the university. Booking spaces, for example, was far too complicated and there was no time to keep waiting for an open slot.

Of course I have or I’ve had to produce my own work, let’s put it like that, and I did not want to wait for. (...) [for the next production] I’ll need some stuff. (Iris)

Iris refers to quite recognized difficulties, namely the facilities were often booked for undergraduate projects. In the mid-2000s, one of the interviewees was carrying out research-related artwork. She experienced some difficulties when seeking support for research productions, both in terms of financing and arranging equipment and facilities. We discussed in detail the support for artistic or practice-based doctorates and the general attitude towards research that existed at that time. A different attitude and approach, as well as secure funding, were thought to be needed in order to create decent working conditions for doctoral students. She called for more easily available facilities for experimental work, for example the possibility to utilize a more laboratory-style working method, to test different variations, styles and patterns of a single artwork.

There was no studio work, so to speak. I could have bought cheap equipment myself in order to try out, for example, different versions. If I started doing the doctorate now with a similar research question, it would make more sense to realize three [artworks], or preferably more than just one, but in different versions of the same material. (Emma)

Also, in the 2000s, research activities were quite separate from the daily activities of the film department. Professors were not involved much

in research and the engagement and interest towards research were not very active.

Afterwards I thought that it would have been beneficial to discuss [my research production] with the department's professor. In a sense, the professors should make a more active contribution. (Iris)

Indeed, research was kept terribly separate from and I felt it is more of a menace [to the department]. This has luckily changed. (Emma)

Since the time of Emma's doctoral studies, research projects have been initiated and the interest in research has markedly increased. However, adequate funds for artistic productions are still lacking. The small grant from the department covers only a fraction of the real production costs.

For Erik, whose project was realized some years later, the experiences were much better. The facilities were more easily available and he received adequate technical support and managed to integrate the undergraduate students into the project, which raised their awareness of research activities.

The production was really smooth in a sense of facilities and support. I can't complain. (Erik)

Paula noted that she was allowed to utilize equipment and facilities but still found it worthwhile to comment that, in the future, doctoral students should have more support for research-related art productions. In her opinion, research activities and research culture at the departmental level have developed considerably and studies on research abilities are more easily available.

In the future, people should learn to demand when they are writing a dissertation. (Paula)

As noted earlier, doctoral candidates discuss artistic productions with their supervisors; however, this discussion is not necessarily about the content of the artwork but touches on questions mainly related to practical advice, the arrangements for productions or other technical details. Supervisors assist in organizing facilities and materials and explain the application procedures for support services.

I've utilized the facilities at the university, especially after the research practices changed and you could apply for these services. For my last production, I received help. (Simo)

For productions there is support (...) This is a new system for doctoral students (...). When I started there was talk about the possibility of getting premises and personnel for one artistic production. (Nora)

You need to write an application for production support well in advance, for example if you need to say that I need props and sound and lighting help for my project. (Jesse)

Thus, the issue of resources was a concern in the interviews because these needs often seem to be overlooked. As Hopwood and Paulson (2012) indicate “the spaces of doctoral learning and experience are not well documented in the [research] literature” (p. 679). Furthermore, there is practically very little funding for research-related artistic projects and studio facilities are not necessarily easily available for doctoral students. Other forms of support in terms of personnel are equally absent. One simple development objective could be to create a more structured support system for research-related artistic productions. Instead of taking care of all the organizational issues on their own, students might get help from a producer whose main task would be to aid in research-related productions, in seeking finance and booking facilities, as well as taking care of the overall project organization.

Underdeveloped infrastructure in art universities has been a concern in various reports. In the SHARE Postgraduate Research Symposium Report in 2011<sup>62</sup>, perceptions of doctoral students were charted and suggestions for improvement solicited. The respondents highlighted the importance of a research infrastructure. Access to research funding and to adequate infrastructure and resources was called for, as well as a greater sense of trust between academic researchers. This is a worldwide concern and the same issues were raised in the recent Australian report about the research programme in film schools. The ability to develop viable projects is dependent on a healthy research culture, which requires various supporting elements,

62 SHARE#1 Helsinki Conference, 04–05 November 2011. Retrieved November 4, 2013 from <http://www.sharenetwork.eu/events/share1-helsinki-conference>.

such as adequate funding, a critical mass of researchers, positive links with industry, and a well-defined research focus.<sup>63</sup>

An infrastructure-related issue, which is probably much easier to solve, concerns spatial solutions, offices and other available spaces, usually considered as self-evident but in reality and in the experiences of the interviewees not necessarily properly organized. The facilitation of peer interaction presupposes spatial arrangements and circumstances. Physical set-ups, office spaces, rooms for informal gatherings seem to play a crucial role, particularly in fighting the isolation of research work. The degree of isolation varies, some interviewees felt quite isolated from the day-to-day activities of their departments. In particular:

Sometimes you feel a little bit isolated, basically I'm in my room reading and writing and there's not that much contact with other researchers. So I think that it would be good to have more activities, not necessarily courses but more activities where people could get together. (Erik)

Interviewees clearly stated that a peer support group could emerge spontaneously or because the structure of room arrangements allowed it. As presented earlier in this section, physical set-ups are part of the research infrastructure, and the fruitful interaction with peers requires adequate spatial solutions and office space. These either enhance or hinder interaction and building a sense of community. At Theatre Academy, the modest rooms are situated around the coffee room, which offers a natural meeting point for researchers and facilitates day-to-day interaction.

At Aalto University's Department of Film, Television and Scenography, spatial set-ups are not as suitable which was also pointed out in one interview.

The sort of sense of a research community, something that is missing from here. (...) That could be improved and I don't think that it could be that difficult. Maybe once a month, once every two months having an informal meeting or something, even an informal seminar, that would benefit everyone. If we had a chance to have something like a

63 Australian Government & Office for Learning and Teaching: "Developing a collaborative national postgraduate research program for 22 Australian film schools". Retrieved October 18, 2014 from [nassolt2011.murdoch.edu.au/?media\\_dl=125](http://nassolt2011.murdoch.edu.au/?media_dl=125)

common space where everyone goes and makes coffee, that would make it so much more dynamic. I've talked to many people, they feel the same. (Erik)

Both the interview responses and my everyday experience when working with doctoral students confirm that a number of issues regarding the research infrastructure are still unresolved. James (2003) claims that the historical position of art outside the academic world explains “the systematic unwillingness to commit sufficient resources” (p. 16) to the creative field. If artistic research is taken seriously it should be on an equal footing with scientific research. Lack of support for infrastructure is a real obstacle to the future development of a field that requires many technical and material resources. Borgdorff (2011) states that “art practices are technically mediated (...) and artworks are materially anchored” (p. 52). When research activities in art universities were introduced, academic resources were only superficially modified. (Biggs & Büchler, 2011, p. 88) A research infrastructure is connected to the consolidation of the research culture, which again requires conscious efforts and policies from decision-makers. (For example, Nowotny, 2011, p. xxi)

#### 6.6.2 FUNDING AS A TOOL

Deficiencies in research funding are one of the key factors militating against the development of a research culture in art universities. The Academy of Finland has performed evaluations of research (Buchanan et al., 2009) and organized sessions where, for example, assessment criteria of artistic research have been discussed. These have not yet resulted in a significant increase in funding opportunities for the creative disciplines.

For individual doctoral candidates, arranging financing is evidently one of the central tools in the doctoral journey. In Finland, doctoral students do not pay any fees but, in turn, financing in terms of salary is available only to a fraction of doctoral candidates. Of my interviewees, however, everyone had managed to guarantee some kind of financial aid, which is quite unusual especially in art universities. Funding periods are often short and only one of the interviewees had a longer employment contract, which guaranteed undisturbed work.

Now that I have a monthly salary I can concentrate. (Maria)



I've got a 2,5 year contract which will end soon. (Nora)

One received a scholarship from a private foundation at the beginning of his/her studies, two were working in an Academy of Finland-supported research project, two had research assistant positions and two were supported via national doctoral programmes. Additionally, two students were awarded state artistic grants on the basis of artistic merit. It should be remarked that these grants are not research funding and the amount is so small that many need to work in order to support their families.

Sometimes receiving financial resources provides the final impetus to start doctoral studies.

The definitive chance [to do the doctoral degree] came from the scholarship I received. (Iris)

I received a scholarship from the [private foundation], and immediately succeeded in getting one. (Emma)

In Finland, funding possibilities for doctoral studies are fragmented and may consist of several sources. Compared with other Nordic countries, for example Sweden<sup>64</sup> or Norway<sup>65</sup>, where funding is guaranteed for doctoral studies, Finnish doctoral candidates have to spend a lot of time and effort in making funding applications. Hiltunen and Pasanen (2006, p. 61) found that over 90% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the funding of doctoral studies. Funding is not sufficient, it is precarious and applying is time-consuming. In an evaluation report of the Finnish doctoral system, Niemi et al. (2011, p. 50) conclude that funding arrangements are real bottlenecks both for full-time and part-time doctoral candidates. Also, it is very arduous to garner funding from several sources. It is recommended that universities concentrate their efforts on seeking funding for those who are an integral part of research communities.

Another factor affecting the everyday life of doctoral students in art universities is the paucity of financing for research-related art productions.

64 Konstnärliga forskarskolan. Retrieved January 15, 2015 from [http://www.konstnarligaforskarskolan.se/wordpress/?page\\_id=55](http://www.konstnarligaforskarskolan.se/wordpress/?page_id=55)

65 The Norwegian Artistic Research Programme. Retrieved January 15, 2015 from <http://artistic-research.no/en/organisasjon/>

Universities usually give small grants but often they are insufficient and cover only a fraction of the real production costs. Financing is supplemented by grants from various private foundations.

The problem obviously relates to the difficult financing situation of practice-based or artistic research in general. The Academy of Finland has organized twice, in 1998 and 2005, a specific funding initiative entitled “Interaction between art and research”, where, in addition to research funding, art productions have been financed by the Arts Council of Finland (today the Arts Promotion Centre Finland). In addition, and as was mentioned in one or two interviews, a postdoctoral culture for practice-based research is missing, there is practically no available postdoctoral support for artist-researchers unlike in the UK, where study times are shorter and postdoctoral research is emphasized.

The issue of research funding in general and specifically in art universities is too extensive to be dealt with properly here. It is certainly one of the topics to be studied in more detail in the future.

#### 6.6.3 INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

In socio-cultural theories, individual activities are framed by institutional structures. The practices in various scholarly communities<sup>66</sup> have their own cultural roots and reflect the values, norms and conceptions of specific research fields. The earlier research literature suggests that disciplines and academic cultures are enacted in institutional and organizational practices, local routines and requirements and are reproduced through the social organization of doctoral research. (Delamont et al., 2000, p. 7)

How these communities are constructed within an evolving field of research is obviously of interest. What are the factors that may contribute to the consolidation of the community of artist-researchers and support its development? Two such institutional and structural issues emerged in the interviews and seemed to be quite important for the interviewees. Namely, there used to be separate orientations for doctoral students at the Theatre Academy, artistic and scientific. This division was abolished in 2007 when a reorganization took place and doctoral education and research were incorporated into the Department of Research Development. (Kirkkopelto, 2011)

66 Pyhältö et al. (2012) define scholarly community “as a community of university-based scholars sharing academic traditions and conventions” (p. 339).

The institutional change was considered quite relevant, it affected everyday life, and also acted as a driving force for development. The aim was to create “a functional and interactive research community for the performing arts, which would have weight for both the main objective of the university, which is artist education, and more widely for the performing arts and related research” (p. 1).

It was indicated in the interviews that doctoral students were involved in the reorganization. There was a need to create a new forum for artistic research and offer more support and supervision for doctoral students. (Aalto, 2012, p. 26) Accordingly, the structural changes contributed clearly to the community atmosphere and the development of a research culture. One respondent mentioned that a team spirit started to develop when the division between artistic and scientific research was abolished. The appreciation of research increased and doctoral students became more visible, which positively affected their sense of belonging. Also, the regulations concerning the number of artistic productions were altered.

This was palpable, the change was remarkable. (...) When the research practice changed and became visible, we got rid of the previous structure and we started to develop our own research culture and it positively affected the team spirit. (Simo)

When the new professorship of artistic research was established, we changed. The artistic component did not need to be a masterpiece with huge amounts of [projects anymore], that changed. (Rosa)

The change was also more widely known, one of the doctoral students from the other university commented that:

there was some kind of turmoil going on, (...) the old ways of doing things were questioned and [the new professor] just started. (Iris)

The aim of building a more organic research culture originated from a situation where artistic education was detached from rather than intertwined with scientific doctoral education. This contradiction acted as an expansive force, which, in activity theoretical thinking, is a necessary condition for change and provides grounds for forming a new kind of agency. Also, changes in the community structure impacted the available mediating

tools, such as the research environment and the availability of peer support. It also demonstrates that different nodes of an activity system are in constant flux, where “tensions, disturbances and local innovations are the rule and engine of change” (Crossouard, 2008, p. 53). This contradictory situation was questioned and reconstructed. This is exactly what took place when students and professors managed to change the existing tradition and to create something new.

The second institutional and structural issue briefly discussed in the interviews was those explicit and implicit rules and regulations concerning doctorates in art universities. In Section 2.2.1, I presented the legal regulatory framework for doctoral education in Finland. In addition, education is governed by regulations and guidelines on supervision, pre-examination, dissertation proceedings and public defence, which are outlined by each respective university. Collective subjects, such as academia on the one hand and a particular artistic field on the other, have different rules and norms for a particular activity (Lektorsky, 2009, p. 82) and both explicit, outspoken and formal or implicit and informal rules govern and influence the subject who performs the activity, a doctoral student undertaking research and aiming for a doctoral degree. Official documents constitute not only a formal regulatory framework but are part of the mediating tools: “Documents organize the activity of the modern world” (Russell, 2009, p. 40). In other words, they also mediate the doctoral experience.

The significance of different rules and regulations in the doctoral experience is most evident in the supervision and pre-examination of artistic productions and the final outcome of a dissertation. Supervisors are involved when the thesis as a whole or the artistic productions included in it are pre-examined. According to the guidelines, the doctoral candidate informs the supervisor of the artistic component about the time and place of the presentation two or three months before the scheduled public presentation. The supervisor gives official permission to proceed with the pre-examination and assesses if the production is ready to be presented in public. This obligation and the supervisor’s role vis-à-vis the rules and regulations were briefly mentioned in the interviews.

The supervisor gives permission to proceed with the production. (...)  
It is somewhat of a formality, but increases transparency. (Jesse)

At the research board meeting, pre-examiners are nominated. (Rosa)

For unique productions, usually two pre-examiners are nominated and, after viewing the live performances or exhibitions, they give statements or reports that include recommendations on whether the work is approved as part of the dissertation or if it should be modified. The pre-examiners receive the research and production plans from the doctoral candidate, or some other written report that helps them to form an opinion on the dissertation and the artistic component as a whole. If the art project is repeatable, such as in the case of film, it is pre-examined at the same time as the written report.<sup>67</sup>

The interviewees referred to the rules and procedures concerning the pre-examination of artistic works; they talked, for example, about the materials and documentation that should be submitted beforehand, and how feedback from the pre-examiners is delivered to the students. We discussed the pre-examiners, their backgrounds and what constituted an optimal combination of the two.

One pre-examiner is artistic and the other is theoretical, I suppose there's a procedure how you inform them and what materials are delivered to the pre-examiners. (Jesse)

They wanted to have a combination such that one [pre-examiner] is from the [art] field and the other is scientifically qualified. (Simo)

Different rules and regulations represent one of the systemic aspects of the doctoral experience but they operate more or less in the background. The interviewees were aware of the procedures and the impact on the doctoral experience as a whole varies and seems not to be of major concern.

I have mainly discussed explicit academic rules and regulations. However, not all of them are explicit. For example, Delamont et al. (2000, p. 173) claim that definitions of what constitutes a valid research problem or what methods are suitable or what modes of research are approved are often tacit, too. In the artistic community, most of the rules are evidently implicit, unwritten and hard to elucidate. For example, artistic freedom is self-evident and artists are carriers of the traditions of their respective fields and, simultaneously, are expected or required to break those conventions, to revitalize their art field and produce something new and unique. (Johansson,

67 Instructions on the Pre-examination of artistic productions at Aalto University. Retrieved May 31, 2012 from <https://into.aalto.fi/display/endoctoraltaik/Pre-examination+of+Art+Productions>.

2014, p. 24) Furthermore, the mostly tacit rules and standards differ in the various fields of art. An obvious example of rules relates to artistic methods and art-specific techniques. (Heikinheimo, 2009, p. 83)

Of the two art fields examined here, the audiovisual field adheres quite rigidly to the traditions of the film production culture. One interviewee observed that students sometimes refer to the practice of film-making as military-style work, because, for example, the division of responsibilities, which has not changed much although digital developments have significantly altered the available tools and equipment. Moreover, the sense of urgency and hurry is very prevalent in film productions mainly because of scarce financial resources. It clearly affects time management, a point raised in the interviews.

In addition, another respondent pointed out that the concept of time differs in theatre and in film. In the former, there is usually time for contemplation, the performances are not necessarily realized in a linear fashion, there are usually moments for contemplation in-between. Johansson (2014, p. 28) has noted that in art, in her case in music, institutions tend to preserve rather than transform their cultures. This is particularly the case in art fields that require cooperation. The research has questioned institutional working habits and conventions but, in particular, current hierarchical structures. (Arlander, 2013, p. 13)

## 6.7 Identity and agency

I became interested in the question of identity after reading Green's (2005) text, according to which "doctoral education is as much about identity formation as it is about knowledge production" (p. 153). Specific research identities are produced within disciplines and epistemological communities, that is, epistemological communities affect both academic and professional identity formation and distribution. (Green, 2005, p. 162; Delamont et al., 2000, pp. 1, 4) Thus, doctoral education not only concerns finishing a dissertation but also the "production of new kinds of selves" (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012, p. 679).

Can there be some discipline-specific identity for those who work at the interface between fields that are traditionally thought to be separate?

How can artistic, professional and academic identities co-exist? Is the process of identity formation within an academic institution fraught with tensions, uncertainties and ambivalence, as Dombois et al. (2012, pp. 154–155) claim? I specifically wished to ascertain what implications the doctoral experience has for the respondents' artistry when research occupies most of their time and dominates their daily activities. I set the question as follows: After starting doctoral studies, do you consider yourself primarily an artist or a researcher? The respondents found this issue extremely interesting and relevant.

Obviously, the question of identity is not at all straightforward. In activity theory, identities are conceptualized as constantly forming and contradictory and related to the subject's position in a certain activity system. The same view exists also more widely in the social sciences. As Alasuutari (2004) points out, identity has been critically discussed during the last three decades. It can be understood as contextual, performative and ambiguous and thus "a coherent and integral self or identity is an illusion" (p. 121). Identities develop, change and are rethought. They define and determine action. Instead of defining identity, Alasuutari talks about identification or identity construction, emphasizing that identity is not a ready-made story but contains elements of continuous storytelling. Pyhältö et al. (2012, p. 345) consider professional identities of doctoral students in a similar manner: rather than being fixed and unitary, professional identities are dynamic and complex, developed and revised "in a cyclic dialectic process in which the formation and maintenance of structure and the readiness for exploration and change alternate" (p. 346). Further, and in the context of artistic research, Dombois et al. (2012, p. 13) discuss jeopardized identities when artists engage in research activities. Former identities cease to appear as given and, in changing and emergent situations and interactions, identities are reconstructed.

The discussion on identity issues was, despite being short, fairly intriguing. Namely, the majority of interviewees considered themselves quite comfortable with their current roles and described themselves as artist-researchers. During their time spent in academia, the artist's identity prevails, but with certain provisions. Being a doctoral student signifies a specific type of artist, that of an artist-researcher.

My horizon is that of an artist but an artist of this kind. Today I put after artist also researcher. For me, researching is a means of being an artist. (Rosa)

Thus, undertaking research is one dimension of artistry, one of the many manifestations of being an artist. The responses reflect the above notion of changing and rethought identities. It was natural for the interviewees to act simultaneously in several roles and in different communities. Furthermore, identities transform in accordance with the artist-researchers' current phase of research, an observation also put forward by two respondents.

During this autumn, the role of researcher is more prominent because I've got more time for it. (Amos)

First of all, it changes all the time, depending on the phase of my research. (Simo)

Simo commented that research has changed his identity for the rest of his life but continued by stating that he needed to perceive the objects of his activity both in writing and in visualizing so that art and research continue side by side. Moreover, the artist's identity is not separable from how art is defined and how these specifications change over time.

I think I am an artist making theoretical [work]. (...) Again, there is a question of identity, what it was 15 years ago, what in general is an artist's identity today. (Jesse)

Jesse here refers to the discussion about community art or conceptual art changing the notion and meaning of art and how artists today incorporate scientific methods into their art-making and determining through research what is the aim of the artwork itself. (Busch, 2009) In conceptual art, for instance, the concepts, ideas and language precede the aesthetic or material aspects.

Identity construction is connected to more general definitions, such as the meaning of "art" in, for example, the fine arts and audiovisual fields.

The word 'artist' when concerning [my art field] is a kind of debate. (...) It is always kind of controversial in some circles but I could



consider myself, I feel comfortable on the one hand calling myself [an artist], that's what I want to be but then on the other hand the term 'researcher', research is obviously what I do actually, I do more research. (Erik)

The other interviewee noted that in the area of film-making the term "artist" is not often used, instead people are addressed according to their specific role, such as director, sound designer, editor, cinematographer, etc. Arlander's (2011, p. 320) observation is similar, when she notes that the defining terms of research, whether practice-based or performance as research, are due to "a different conception of art" than that applied to music. In theatre and film, "art" does not refer to the field as a whole but to a certain sub-genre or it is used as a term of quality such as art films. Understanding art in various ways, such as experimentation, exploration, skill, expression, originality, critical commentary, or entertainment, has an impact on research-related questions and on the positioning of artistic research. (Arlander 2013, p. 15)

Amos and Maria mentioned that 'both sides', making art and doing research, are actually very necessary for them as artists. Intertwining art and research creates a positive circle and provides a richer working environment, the fertile combination truly nourishing each other.

Yes, they support each other, I consider myself to be privileged that I can alternately concentrate on both. (Amos)

I combine different things, it suits me well, I couldn't keep doing solely artistic work, the work would not be as good, I need the balance of writing and analysis in-between. (Maria)

Allen Collinson (2005), when studying art and design students' identity construction and modification, claims that students possess certain, often embodied, dispositions, perceptions and motivations that are grounded in their creative identities. Inherent in the identity of an artist are an emotional presence, intuition, spontaneity, and an openness to new ideas. Being a researcher requires rationality, argumentation, objectivity and a logical and systematic progression of ideas, and engaging with conceptual thinking may generate tensions and contradictions and even be detrimental to creative thinking. Thus, according to Allen Collinson (2005, pp. 716–718), doctoral students in the creative disciplines have difficulties in maintaining credible

identities in two domains. The transition from the creative to the analytic mode was described as confused, distressed and even detrimental to creative activity, with the most problematic feature of research being the requirement for analytical writing about art-making.

In contrast to what the interviewees of this study say about identities, Allen Collinson considers an artist's identity as somewhat static, strong and dominating. Transformation takes place only when a new comprehension between the practice and research areas is developed from this contradictory situation, that is, research and the analysis of it were found to be a creative process and the acquired new competence increased the artists' feelings of empowerment. (Allen Collinson, 2005, p. 723) It should be observed that respondents in Allen Collinson's enquiry were much younger than those in this study who were relatively experienced artists and whose identities as artists probably have a firmer basis. Furthermore, students today are better aware of the practices of academic life, the expectations they are facing, and the general requirements for doctoral degrees in art universities.

Various groupings, material and symbolic resources, as well as other social and personal factors, affect the way identity is constructed. (Bernat, n.d.) Thus, Maria's experience demonstrates how fellow artists affect the way identity is defined. Those peers who were unfamiliar with the academic environment considered the position of an artist-researcher as follows:

I realized recently that this kind of defining came also from the outside. (...) For example, I think of myself as an artist who does research, in this particular order. Then I realized that my colleagues began asking when my next production would be ready. (...) They do not realize that I'm working all the time, but it is research [that I do]. (Maria)

A similar notion was presented in Hockey's (2003) study. He notes that "the evaluation of the wider artistic community of peers remains an important concern" (p. 85) for artists undertaking a doctoral degree.

Between 2010 and 2012, the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts coordinated a project that scrutinized changes in European conceptions of the artist's identity and the creative potential it lends to society.<sup>68</sup> The project

68 The EU supported project Changing Identities and Contexts in the Arts: Artistic Research as the new European Paradigm for the Arts. Retrieved April 7 2014 from <http://changingidentities.eu>.

description states that “the prevailing image of’ artist still lingers around the idea of a creative genius, inherited from the Romantic period, but the real dimensions of the profession today are much more diverse: generator of new knowledge, writer and philosopher, organiser and manager, an active participant in societal debate”, not to mention a plethora of future possibilities. The findings of the study are in line with the project description: artists are no longer geniuses but workers aiming to become, for example, researchers. The subjectivity of an artist has changed and that is caused by the ongoing transformation of the relationship between society and the arts. (Nowotny, 2011, pp. xxiii)

Additional evidence for the wish to adhere not only to research activities but to preserve connections to the art field is that many interviewees emphasized that they realize other artistic projects in addition to those included in the research. The projects realized outside academia differ from the research-related art projects in that they do not necessarily involve any research angle or provide research aspects.

In my opinion not necessarily all art and artworks are research. (...) It depends on how you relate to it. I’ve thought that some productions do not offer interesting points of view for my research; they are either too restricted or too narrowly defined. (Simo)

In addition to it [research-related artworks] I’ve done a lot of art which is by no means part of any research. When it is part of my research, it naturally affects the way of doing art. Some of these artistic projects have been artistic experiments, literally, and I feel that it is important for an audience to know the background. (Nora)

I’ve got smaller, let’s say, experimental [artworks] which are carried out often and quickly. (Jesse)

For the respondents, it was clear that not all art is research and the contribution varies according to the context. In other words, they were aware that a research intent is needed. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 208) It is the most fundamental aspect when assessing whether an artwork or art practice qualifies as research.

People do not realize the context [of research] – artists may say that I, for example, research a certain historical thing, it has inspired me and it is research that they do but it differs from research that is contextualized and disclosed within a [research] context. In my opinion, one should be aware of what kind of research is being talked about. (Simo)

The interviewee refers here to the often heard argument that all art-making is somehow connected to research and every artistic endeavour involves a research angle. The same question can be posed for many scientific disciplines: how playing sports differs from studying sports science or how politics and political science are separated. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 4) This is a common demarcation problem in the philosophy of science, that is, how to distinguish between science and non-science or pseudo-science.

Although the interview question was about identity, it might be more worthwhile to look at the above discussion in relation to the concept of agency, since it emphasizes subjects as active agents and allows positioning individual action into a wider context of social structures. As a term, agency is difficult to define and its use depends on the goals of the scholars who employ it. (Hitlin, 2007, p. 170) In CHAT, agency has been defined as the participants' ability and will to purposefully shape their respective activity systems (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 20) which, applied here, means that, for example, doctoral students themselves are actively moulding both themselves and their particular activity systems, in this case research cultures. Furthermore, agency within a certain activity system is understood as a subject's potential to create new activities and tools. Humans are creators and transformers, shaping institutions and practices through agency. (Yamazumi, 2009, p. 212) It could be assumed that research by definition is an agentic activity when a subject, for instance a doctoral candidate, works on his/her object and transforms it by "contesting its meaning and understanding it better" (Edwards, 2007, p. 1), not only the object but the subject itself transforms.

This notion of transformation of subjectivity is contained in Kirkkopelto's view on research when he states that one of the central outcomes of the research in art universities is also "a new kind of artistic agent, an inventor, an artist-researcher, the primary expert of the medium that they themselves have created" (Kirkkopelto, 2011). The transformations of subjectivity and object take place within certain cultures that are also evolving. (Edwards, 2007, p. 7). Thus, identity or identity construction, although recognized as

changing, refers to something personal whereas agency characterizes action and activity, doing or realizing something, working with a certain object.

What then are these activities and processes, elements and ingredients for new artist-researcher or new artistic agency? The University of the Arts Helsinki coordinates the Finnish Doctoral Programme of Artistic Research (TahTO). It lists new artistic agency as one of its themes.<sup>69</sup> Personal questions, “who am I” and “how do I work” are articulated through research “in the form of more general questions concerning artistic agency”, with each doctoral research project providing its own answers. Research creates not only results but “a new kind of artistic expert and practitioner” whose work contributes to two domains. At the TahTO seminar, Irwin (2013) elaborated on this concept so that new artistic agency challenges and renews traditional models, develops new forms of interactions and encounters between artists and audiences, opens up new fields of operation, and promotes cooperation between various social functions.

69 Other themes are Methodology and practices of artistic research and Art, aesthesis and society. Retrieved February 9, 2015 from <http://www.artisticresearch.fi/tahto/themes/>



## 7 CONCLUSIONS

## 7.1 Introduction

This study has provided insights into the activities of doctoral candidates in art universities. Its aim was to find out how students experience the doctoral process and to highlight both subjective perceptions and the setting within which the process takes place. The focus was on the active subject – the doctoral candidate, and the study has addressed those activities he/she engages in during the doctoral journey. From the start, I considered it important to give voice to individual doctoral students, to embrace their experiences, and to make them visible. The relevance of such research, that is, unravelling the experiences of individual doctoral students, is not only based on my personal observations but also on those expressed by others. For instance, Hannula et al. (2014, pp. 85–86) maintain that such information is necessary for the continuous development of a research environment in art universities. It is crucial to determine what the pitfalls are and to consider whether there exist particular organizational solutions that could pave the way for a smoother doctoral path.

As discussed, there is a paucity of studies conducted from the point of view of a doctoral student, especially in the context of art universities. Previous surveys<sup>70</sup> have aimed to develop pedagogical processes, enhance learning and, ultimately, find ways to reach policy goals. The pioneering research by Hockey and Allen Collinson (2002, 2005) has been a source of inspiration.

This concluding chapter presents the significance of the research undertaken and a summary of the results. Its purpose is also to evaluate whether the study has succeeded in responding to the presented research questions.

In Chapter 1, I asked about the context and circumstances of artistic doctorates in Finland. Despite the fact that this research field is rather new, the legitimacy and recognition of artistic practice as part of academia and its epistemological and ontological status have been widely debated. Artistic research has its own unique characteristics. The linking of artistic practice and theoretical thinking and the focusing on practical and theoretical reflections have the potential to enrich and broaden the conceptions of current academic and scientific research. (Nowotny, 2011, p. xx) Many writers agree that research in the artistic context is emerging as a new way of producing

70 *The International Postgraduate Students Mirror* (2006); Hodsdon & Buckley (2011, pp. 3–5); Sainio (2010); Hiltunen & Pasanen (2006).



knowledge and as a novel field of research. Artistic research provides optional avenues for the traditional formation of knowledge and an alternative perspective on conventional research. (For instance, Downmunt & Pearce, 2008; Arlander, 2013) It is equally important to bear in mind the contribution artistic research makes to the current discourse on art and to the various artistic practices in the respective art fields, as well as to the provision of tools for transformation and development. Thus, research in art universities has a societal relevance and a practical value, as shown by Tuunainen (2005a, p. 113).

In parallel with the internal development of research, universities face external constraints, such as increased competition for diminishing resources and the requirements of a knowledge-based society. Universities are expected to network and collaborate with society and industry, to strengthen national economic growth, which today is increasingly based on the contribution of the so-called creative industries. This development accentuates the relevance of research activities in art universities.

## 7.2 Summary of empirical findings

Today, more and more artists are interested in doctoral studies and the number of completed doctorates is increasing constantly. The responses revealed that research questions emerged from observations within artistic practice and were formulated into research interests and ideas. All the interviewees were professional artists and this provided the initiative for their research. For some, these experiential ideas were the motivation to apply for doctoral studies, for others the studies offered a break from their daily artistic work. For a handful of interviewees, theoretical insights had always been part and parcel of art-making. The emergence of doctoral studies was interpreted as a manifestation of the growing tendency for theoretical considerations in art. This finding supports the study of Candy and Edmonds (2011, p. 123), according to which research questions and issues can emerge naturally from practice, but, theoretical starting points, or literature, can also generate questions relating to this practice.

There are as many ways to combine artistic activities with research endeavours as there were interviewees. The modes of integrating art and research and various approaches to the research methodology are, in a sense,

similar to the notion of *unruly bricolage*. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, pp. 5, 8) A bricoleur is a person who pieces together sets of representations, incorporating different tools, methods and techniques. When a bricoleur is at work, boundaries that previously separated traditional disciplines no longer hold. Furthermore, Denzin's and Lincoln's idea of using "the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods and empirical material at hand and if needed, invent new tools or techniques" (p. 8) describes accurately the manner in which the interviewees talked about the nexus of art and research and depicts the methods used in artistic research.

When discussing the scope of artistic production and production duties, it was noted that doctoral students in art universities put a great deal of effort into their degrees. The sheer amount of work required to complete a doctorate in an art university came as a surprise to the interviewees. The number of artistic productions needed to answer the initial research question was usually overestimated at the beginning of the study. The requirement for high-quality artworks was not a concern in itself. Although the interviewees negotiated the scope of their artistic productions with their supervisors, they often ended up doing not only "double doctorates", but maybe even triple the amount of work. In addition to planning and realizing artistic projects, reflecting on them and concentrating on the analytic writing, the other production-related duties were also mostly the students' responsibility.

Artistic doctorates are laborious and time-consuming. The current recommended four-year limit for doctoral candidates in the funded programmes is difficult to achieve because of the above-mentioned conditions. In the interviews, the pros and cons of the Finnish way of very flexible study times was briefly discussed. The downside of long studies is the fact that often a considerable length of time had elapsed between the artworks and the written component and the original research question may have changed many times. Historically, flexibility in study times has been valued in Finland and it is regarded as a manifestation of academic freedom. In the wake of the restructuring of university education, more attention has been paid to the timely completion requirement. (Jäppinen et al., 2003)

The number of obligations naturally depends on the nature of the artistic production. In the fields investigated in this study, art productions are usually realized within groups, which further complicates production work. However, in handling the production duties, the students also develop

employability-related skills, the so-called transferable skills, that in many policy documents are considered to be a valuable asset for future employment.

It is worth noting that the seemingly large number of artistic productions is sometimes necessary in order to answer the posed research question. As some interviewees maintained, the research ideas become more explicit after each completed artwork and reducing the number of projects would have undermined the basis of their research. It is obvious that making art is at the core of the research and an essential component in the process of knowledge production. (See also Candy & Edmonds, 2011, p. 123)

Research ideas and starting points usually evolve when reflecting on the outcomes of artistic productions. Reflection was acknowledged as being important, yet something artists are not necessarily used to in their professional practice. Nelson (2008, p. 15) observes that “the knowledge in artistic doctorates lies in the process” and a central tenet of the process is the symbiotic relationship between practice and theory. (Candy & Edmonds, 2011, p. 127) Avoiding advance choices and hypotheses and concentrating on the process are emphasized, which again means that a constant state of flux is a significant feature of doctorates in art universities. Setting the knowledge conveyed via art projects into a contextual framework is a demanding task, as is the question of how to develop that knowledge further within one’s research. In a way, going back and forth between theoretical understanding and the knowledge gained in making artworks, that is, the see-saw process, is what produces knowledge. Building the nexus of art and research is evident in the ways the doctoral candidates proceed with their projects, the artistic production and theoretical thinking transform each other and constitute a circular process.

The third sub-theme dealt with the requirement to document or record artistic productions, an issue that many considered central, yet something easily forgotten or overlooked. Although the requirement is clearly stipulated in the university regulations, the importance of documentation was not necessarily realized at the beginning of the studies. Both the paucity of time and the lack of advice seemed to result in insufficient documentation, which is something students usually regret when the dissertation is about to be finished. In artistic doctorates, documentation is a central aspect of mediation since it assists in reflecting on the completed artworks, which, in turn, paves the way for moving into the writing phase.

Writing is still one of the central sign-mediated activities within academia, including art universities. Based on earlier findings by Hockey and

Allen Collinson (2002, 2005), it was expected that writing would be difficult for artists and even destructive to the creative flow. However, on the contrary, the interviewees had no apparent problems in reflecting on their research through writing. In addition to their previous academic studies, they had gained practice in writing texts related to artistic projects or, in some cases, as journalists. It should be kept in mind that the majority of respondents were mature artists with long-standing artistic and professional careers. Thus, their experience in writing is more extensive than the target groups of earlier studies who continued straight from master's to doctoral studies.

Interviewees also indicated that writing and art-making are two sides of the same process, both require thinking and doing. As Hannula et al. (2005, pp. 4, 37) note, writing is one of the forms where the world is both observed and created. It is important to treat language in a pluralistic manner so that the "uniqueness of artistic experience is not lost when our thinking about it is communicated". In addition, Nelson (2013, p. 32) notes that writing is not only thinking but practice as well. The interviewees commented that dissertations in art universities should eventually and, in the best circumstances, linguistically portray the spirit of the artwork, which is obviously a demanding task.

At the time of the interviews, the universities did not provide guidelines for weighting the practical or artistic and the thesis or written components. The relationship varies depending on the research question, according to how the combination of art and theory in the submission answers the research question, and if the thesis demonstrates adequately the processes of the research and critical reflection on the results. (Tinkler & Jackson, 2004, p. 116)<sup>71</sup> In the final stage of writing this research report, I learned that in the new degree regulations of the Theatre Academy, the recommended length of the written component (entitled a commentary) is 150–200 pages. I agree with their suggestion, as it may assist doctoral students in structuring the overall workload more appropriately. However, it would not be appropriate to try to impose a strict deadline for completion of the study in view of the process-like nature of artistic research.

The last sub-theme, coursework and teaching, was included at the final

71 According to Webb & Melrose (2014), in Australia and in the UK, the written component in the creative fields (Doctors of Creative Art or creative PhD) is limited to 30,000 words, whereas "a conventional PhD requires the writing of up to 100,000 words" and in some UK institutions a so-called "contextualising statement in support of the creative artifact need only be around 8,000 words" (p. 139).

stage of the analysis when I examined how the interviewees talked about the obligatory studies. It became evident that the role of such studies is not considered very relevant by the interviewees but they referred to their own teaching activities as a source of feedback and encouragement. In a holistic conception of doctoral education these three activities, research, teaching and learning, are seen as being interconnected. (Cummings, 2010, p. 35)

The third theme, mediating activities, contains aspects that assist students in their doctoral path. It consists of the sub-themes of supervision, peer support and group activities, on the one hand, and more material aspects, such as research infrastructure, funding and institutional conditions, on the other.

If we consider the workload described above, it is reasonable to ask what could be done to make it more manageable. The official response is quite unequivocal. Problems are not solved but are at least ameliorated if every doctoral candidate is guaranteed proper funding and the amount and quality of supervision is adequate. The supervisor is considered as the key person contributing to the progress of doctoral work. Increasingly more policy documents are being published that highlight the importance of supervision. (Karjalainen, 2006; Dill et al., 2006, p. 54; Niemi et al., 2011) Also, numerous studies on supervision, mainly from the supervisor's point of view, indicate that supervision is important.

The actual experiences of this study only marginally support the official view on the relevance of supervision. Supervisory practices, though apparently unstructured, are unproblematic and the relationship with supervisors is quite collegial. Supervision is usually needed at the beginning of doctoral studies when the doctoral work as a whole is being discussed and the scope of the artistic component is under consideration. When the manuscript is ready to be submitted for pre-examination, students work closely with supervisors because the supervisor's permission to submit the work is required. However, in the intervening period, students seemed to manage on their own.

The uncontrolled individual nature and the traditional independence of art-making practices seem to transfer into everyday academic life and are most clearly reflected in supervision. Supervision in art represents the typical hands-off approach described, for example, by Kroll (2009), meaning that there is a great deal of reliance on the student's independence and ability to carry out research. The supervisor provides space for the student's decision-making, and recognizes and supports the student's own thinking

process, an approach that is appropriate for those who have a high level of professional competence. The relationship resembles the interaction between colleagues and the hierarchy between professor and student is missing. This hands-off approach was most evident in the amount of support required for the artistic productions.

The methodology of artistic research is an evolving one and that is the point when students need assistance from supervisors. When the productions have been completed and the reflection phase has begun, and especially when writing the final submission, students seek support to bring everything together. An important issue is how this shift in focus is mediated. The meaning of spoken language or communicative mediation (Bødker & Andersen, 2005, p. 360) is obvious in supervisory situations. Discoursing in mediation is “an iterative, dynamic process” and, evidently, when art productions are reflected upon, “conversations interpret and transform also representations belonging to instrumental, that is tool-mediated, activity” (p. 374). In other words, in discussion with supervisors, the artistic tool-mediated work is reinterpreted in relation to the research frame. Such reflection produces new conceptions on the research question.

At the outset, I was intrigued by how supervisors can support the reflection stage and help to build the connection with art research, even though the supervision is divided between art and theory and the supervisors would not necessarily communicate with each other, as was the case in the interviews. To tackle this problem, a team model for supervision has been deservedly sought.

Since supervision appeared quite unproblematic, we ended up talking about other, more mundane, everyday activities and other support structures. Support received from peers appeared relevant in a situation where not much supervisory advice is expected regarding the content of the artworks. Doctoral students discussed dissertation problems and questions with fellow artist-researchers and members of artistic teams. Even though the production teams may not have been fully aware of the research approach, advice from them was valuable. Support from colleagues within the doctoral programme was essential because of the shared understanding of research-related issues and the challenges encountered along the way. Informal discussions conducted around the coffee table often concerned matters related to the practicalities of research and research management. Issues such as how to cite and format references or how to rephrase a chapter title seem

minor but a quick opinion from a colleague might make a difference to the advancement of the doctoral project.

Therefore, it can be concluded that supervision is only one facet of the available support and the significance of other more informal sources of guidance should also be recognized. It seems that peer support is not acknowledged officially although, particularly in the art fields, productions are realized in groups that share work practices and whose members are familiar with each other.

Thus, doctoral students are relationally agentic; the interviewees recognized and utilized a wide range of significant sources, networks and other people as resources. (Hopwood, 2010b, p. 838) Based on the empirical material of this study, I agree with Hopwood's (2010a) critical opinion on the discrepancy between the official view and the everyday experience: "This negotiation takes place according to their own ambitions and needs, which are often something other than policy documents delineate" (p. 109).

These conceptions of supervision and peer support are part of the wider environment in which doctoral research is realized. Re-conceptualizing eco-socially the support for doctoral students (Green, 2005, p. 153), that is, understanding it as part of an entire scholarly community (Macleod & Holdridge, 2011, p. 399), requires an examination of the wider aspects. Such an eco-social approach was sought when examining institutional conditions, such as the significance of infrastructure, on the one hand, and rules and regulations, on the other. The latter seems not to be of major concern for doctoral students, while the former plays an instrumental role in research cultures in art universities and consists of various mediational means, ranging from ICT and libraries to those tools needed in experimentation and, finally, to the elements needed for completing research-related artistic productions, such as studio spaces, equipment and technical support. Bringing this infrastructure to a level that meets the current requirements set for research activities in art universities is a major question of research policy and still needs to be solved properly. Furthermore, successful interaction with peers presupposes physical arrangements that encourage such activity. Simple spaces for informal gatherings seem to play a crucial role, they mediate the doctoral experience in an unexpected manner.

Funding, in terms of ensuring finance for both the research work and the artistic productions, is a matter that has thus far received relatively little attention, although it is one of the central factors contributing to a successful doctoral experience. The sample in this study does not represent the reality

of doctoral students in art universities because all the interviewees had managed to guarantee research scholarships for their studies. Actually, funding opportunities are very scarce in Finland and students spend a lot of effort drafting scholarship applications.

The final theme, identity and agency, was constructed on the basis of the question concerning how undertaking a doctoral degree affects students' identity. Based on the interview data, the distinction between being either an artist or a researcher has vanished and doctoral students were comfortable with their current positions as artist-researchers. Some thought it was a privilege to be able to work simultaneously as artists and researchers, a notion proposed also by Helke (2006, p. 7). Moreover, the subject position is not constant but changes as the research progresses. I consider these responses to be an indication that, through research, a new kind of artistry emerges that includes aspects of being a researcher. Emphasizing the differences between being either an artist or a researcher is a thing of the past and doctoral students consider themselves without difficulty as artist-researchers.

In the interview agenda, the question was formulated as an identity issue but when pondering it in analysis, the concept of agency appeared theoretically more relevant because of the emphasis on the potential of an acting subject to create new activities and tools. Agency is about the ability to reflect and evaluate, it means doing something purposeful and it embodies the notion of change. (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 53) It means "testing and going beyond the limits of what is required and allowed" (Engeström, 2009, p. 325). Individuals practice agency when constructing knowledge (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 46), and if we think about the role of artworks in research, knowledge construction obviously includes the activities of art-making.

Kirkkopelto (2011, 2014), when theorizing about transformation processes in artistic research, notes that not only the medium of art changes but the change concerns also the artist as a practitioner. In a way, this idea of transformation comes close to socio-cultural theories, where the transactional relationship between subject and object means that when the meaning of a certain object is re-conceptualized, the acting subject also transforms. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how institutions equally change. Kirkkopelto maintains that a process-oriented or transformational idea of research is central, making "*change* the major criterion of artistic research project". An artist changes his/her artistic medium into one of research. When practice is articulated as research, the routes of its discovery are made visible. There are no predetermined patterns or models but artist-researchers themselves



suggest them with and through the particular medium. The vital concept is the medium, meaning simultaneously something that enables the change or transition and also its exposition. I consider this idea of transformation relevant and suggest that one of the outcomes of this study is to demonstrate how this *transformation is mediated, assisted and supported and to present some of those factors that bring forth the transformation.*

Thus, a new artistic agency emerges within new practices. In this dissertation, I have introduced these activities within an educational context. Perhaps the most relevant issue is that when a doctoral candidate or an artist-researcher achieves his/her goal of integrating art and research, the collective system, namely the research community or culture, also changes. A viable academic identity (Macleod & Holdridge, 2004, p. 157), whether individual or institutional, develops gradually. Again, to emphasize the active nature of developmental processes, it is more feasible to talk about academic agency.

## 7.3 Cultural historical activity theory

The theoretical framework was chosen first and foremost because it offered a useful approach for understanding the interaction between artistic and academic perspectives, traditions and interests. Research in art universities is typically a hybridized activity that has emerged when existing cultural and organizational boundaries have been crossed. (Yamazumi, 2009, p. 213) Furthermore, activity theory assists in understanding the development of new activities and how those involved in them experience the evolving situation. (Engeström, 2009, p. 313) From the start, I was interested in the dialectical relationship between the student and the organizational and intellectual contexts of doctoral studies. I wished to include the institutional level of doctoral education and, with the help of CHAT, it was possible to grasp the systemic level, to consider simultaneously the individual activities, and to take into account the questions of research culture, environments, communities, policies and aims.

A new discipline is often in a continuous state of flux, conflict and turmoil (Borgdorff, 2012, pp. 6–7), and the research positioned at the interface between art and academia causes tensions and controversies. The notion of the transformative potential of controversy is central in activity

theory. When those involved in a certain activity start to work with “double binds”, the process leads to expansive learning where these contradictions are reconstructed. (Crossouard, 2008, p. 53) New artistic agency, whether individual or institutional, can be considered to represent expansive agency (Engeström, 2009, p. 312), a situation when critical conflicts are resolved. Such developments have been conceptualized by the metaphor of zone (Engeström, 2009), which implies pre-existing trails and boundaries set by others, with weighty and often contradictory histories and power structures. The history and current situation in artistic or practice-based research could be understood as such a zone where artists have entered the terrain of academia, adapting to dominant trails and, at the same time, struggling to create something new. (Engeström, 2009, p. 312) Contradictions are therefore integral to activity systems and necessary for the development of practice, they are the breeding ground for conflicts, and form the basis for change and expansion. (Nicolini, 2013, p. 114) Some of those who have written about the developmental issues in art universities agree on this. For instance, Paltridge et al. (2011, p. 253) state that confusion and creative growth are intrinsically interlinked. Dombois et al. (2012) acknowledge that conflicting narratives exist and they consider that the lack of fixed parameters provides an exciting opportunity. Tensions and different conflicting views both on the individual and the institutional level actually contribute to the development of research cultures in art universities. (p. 12)

On the other hand, the recent tendency has been to build bridges between artistic and academic communities, as mentioned in Section 2.2.3. Experimentation characterizes both artistic and academic work. Similarly, “curiosity, creative enquiry and critical reflection underpin much that is considered research in various fields” (Mäkelä & O’Riley, 2012, p. 10), not to mention imagination, which is the main driving force both in art and in science. In addition, uncertainty is typical both for art and science. In the creation of knowledge, results and outcomes are, by definition, unknown. (Delamont et al., 2000, p. 2) The iterative cyclic web model of Smith and Dean (2010, pp. 7–8) considers the methodologies and frameworks for the relationship between creative practice and research. Both academic and practice-led research share the idea generation phase, both select a certain approach and develop ideas into outputs. Although the outcomes differ, the process is similar.

These two tendencies are not mutually exclusive, finding a common ground is as important as it is to acknowledge that contradictions and

conflicts are an integral part of activity systems in art and academia. Gaining new understandings of the spheres of art and research is crucial, whether seeking similarities or recognizing tensions as engines of growth. The main issue is that the research field develops and doctoral students are provided with sufficient mediational means and tools to guarantee a smooth doctoral path.

In Sections 3.2 and 5.1, I have explained the rationale of concentrating on the concepts of mediation and formation of an object when tackling the empirical material and constructing the thematic structure. Focusing only on the upper part of the activity theoretical triangle was a conscious choice, which was based on the research literature (for instance, Hopwood & Stocks, 2008) and on informal discussions with researchers who had previously used this framework. The empirical material was not sufficiently comprehensive for the full-scale analysis and therefore division of labour, community and rules were omitted.

Throughout the text, I have tried to indicate the points where the theoretical framework has guided the interpretation. Figure 10 demonstrates how the thematic structure relates to activity theoretical thinking.

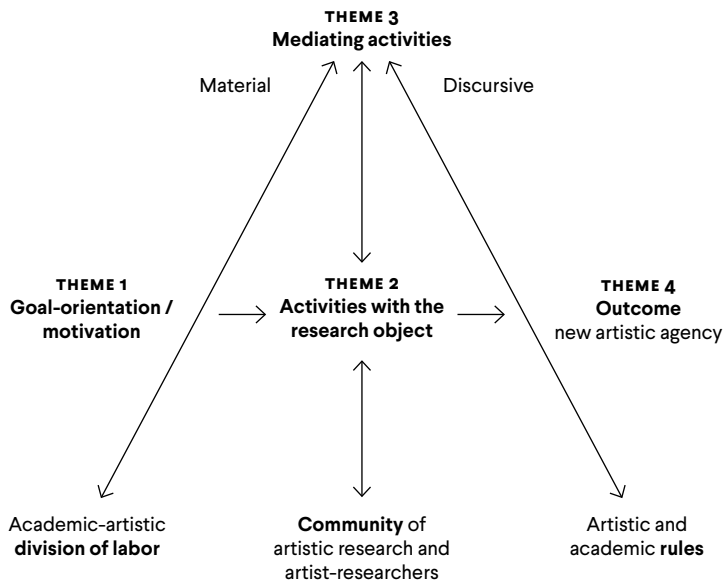


FIGURE 10 – The thematic structure and activity theory

The idea of expected goal orientation in activity is evident in the first theme, *the motivation for undertaking doctoral studies*. The second theme, *activities with the research object*, means those distinctive features that undertaking a doctoral degree in an art university entail and it relates to the centrality of an object in activity theory. Objects define and direct activities, they are often unambiguous, multivoiced, complex and, in artistic research, contain features from two fields. Within this theme, I discussed integration of art and research, which again is closely related to reflection, writing and documentation.

The third theme, *mediating activities*, in turn, is based on the central idea of mediation in activity. Various ideational and material equipment, structures and set-ups make practices and activities possible. Mediating artefacts and tools, either concrete artworks or epistemic, such as language, frameworks and theories, contribute to the achievement of an object. Eventually, and in the subsequent activity, the object and outcome transform into mediational means. (Wells, 2002, p. 60) In artistic research, this means that each dissertation and completed research project is a building block for the research culture, that is, it creates new knowledge and contributes to an understanding of the relationship between art and theory. In other words, creating new artefacts expands both practices and ourselves. (Nicolini, 2013, pp. 106–107)

If we compare the starting points presented in Figures 3 and 4 (Section 3.2.3), the empirical findings and the thematic structure of this thesis, it is necessary to emphasize the interactive relationship between object, mediational means, rules and division of labour. In Figure 4, supervisors and the supervising professor were regarded as belonging to the academic division of labour but, in the analysis, I considered them as part of discursive mediation. The same applies to peers, fellow researchers and artists and research groups. Additionally, discourse on artistic research, how activities of art and research are combined and how the nexus of art and research is reached were initially thought to be part of mediation but eventually I found it more apt to consider them as being part of those activities that concern the research object. Thus, my intention has been to avoid a mechanical analysis and, instead, to use the activity theoretical triangle as a framework and to emphasize the dynamic nature between its nodes.

When realizing art productions, doctoral students work within certain existing genres but one of the central aims is to challenge these conventions and, through research, renew one's field of art. For instance, development of

novel work methods and techniques is often included in research endeavours. Here, and following Kirkkopelto's (2014) thinking, one of the central outcomes is a new kind of professional who, through artistic research, has changed not only his/her work methods and environment but also produces new artistic agency (Theme 4).

## 7.4 Practical implications

Although this study presents a cross-section of experiences of doctoral students in Finnish art universities at the beginning of the 2010s, it has potentially some practical implications for the future development of doctoral education and research culture. Earlier research indicates that academic practices are to some extent inherited and supervisors tend to emulate the supervision they themselves received. (Grant, 2005; Hill, 2011) In art universities, usually two supervisors, one for theory and the other for art, concentrate on their specific areas of expertise. Thus, the most challenging aspect of the artistic doctorate, the actual combination of art and research, is in danger of being left without proper support.

I agree with writers who suggest that the pedagogical supervisory model in art universities could benefit from the creative practice itself and from utilizing its work methods. (Yeates & Carson, 2009, p. 4) Such could include improvisation as proposed by Grant (2005). The moment of supervision where improvisation occurs is akin to a creative play or process taking place between two thinkers. The student and supervisor think aloud and create the moment together in an unscripted manner, riffing off each other to realize the thesis. Good improvisation requires the ability to engage in intense listening, to be able to catch the moment, and to tolerate any ambiguity (pp. 161–173). Moreover, Grant sees supervision as an unpredictable process that requires thoughtful judgment and risk-taking from both the supervisor and the student. In this process, tensions and contradictions are not aberrations, but have creative, if problematic, implications (p. 15).

To sum up, when reflecting on what would be the best possible supervisory model in art universities, the following aspects are worth considering. When nominating supervisors, universities should rely on the expertise of those who have experience of both art and academia, in other words on

those who have graduated from art universities. Additionally, such artist-researchers are usually active members of a current community of artist-researchers. I recommend that further emphasis be placed on the collaborative spirit and equality of the supervisory relationship because doctoral candidates in art universities are not novices but motivated, experienced and knowledgeable professionals. Rather than dividing supervision between art and theory, a team supervisory model would add a certain rigour to the research process and guarantee a balance between artistic work and theoretical aspects. Although team supervision with diverse points of view may be demanding for a doctoral candidate, it brings a complementarity and expertise to the supervisory situation. Last but not least, there needs to be proper remuneration for supervisors since most supervisors do not have permanent positions at universities and are external to the organization.

Along with these practical suggestions, realizing a supervisory model that tends towards creative practice or improvisation can be difficult to accomplish. Much less complicated to implement is the practical advice the students requested. Doctoral candidates need simple checklists, road maps to follow, or a list of tips and best practices, what to take into account when planning their studies and artistic productions. A proper outline of the future doctoral path was called for. This observation not only concerns art universities: in a 2006 survey (Hiltunen & Pasanen, 2006, p. 36), almost 80 per cent of respondents felt that they had not received sufficient advice at the beginning of their doctoral studies.

Compared with the rigorous pre-examination and graduation regulations, few milestone activities are included in the actual doctoral process at the time that the interviews were held. The only exception concerns the pre-examination of artistic productions, which usually takes place in the middle of the candidature. Guiding doctoral students through the process is critically important and practices should be further developed to ensure quality research and, in particular, an organic dialogue between theory and practice.

The scope of artistic doctorates requires attention. The study times are extensive and students struggle with the practicalities of research. Contrary to the sometimes presented notion of artistic doctorates being insubstantial or lacking in rigour, the results of this study confirm the laborious nature of artistic doctorates. I completely agree with Nelson (2013), when he notes that “a broader range of skills” is required “to engage in a multi-mode research inquiry” (p. 9).

Finnish art universities started research activities early and with enthusiasm. Arlander (2013, p. 7) writes that one of the reasons is the historical Finnish attitude of being responsible for one's own fate, a kind of frontiersman approach to the new.

It seems that although initially research was rapid and energetic, funding of artistic research was not properly taken into account. Artistic research often challenges explicit academic rules and long-standing academic traditions. If we review research funding schemes, artistic research is evaluated using the same criteria as any other research field, that is, artist-researchers compete on an equal footing with other researchers for the resources of the main funding body, the Academy of Finland.

The funding instruments are rigid and change very slowly. Additionally, the assessment criteria drag behind the development of research fields. Compared with science universities and with those fields that require an extensive array of instruments and apparatus, biotechnology for instance, research in art universities is still fighting for adequate resources, although the social significance of art has increased and the importance of artistic research is acknowledged. Much discussions and lobbying are still needed in order to challenge funding agencies to consider their practices and to convince policy-makers of the growing significance of artistic research. At the same time, highly motivated artist-researchers try to do their work, raise research funding, and reach the performance indicators set by the policy-makers.

Even today, there are practically no adequate funding systems for artistic productions. The research infrastructure, both in terms of equipment and support personnel, is still inadequate. This phenomenon is well known, for example in Australia, where, in a recent report on research in film schools (Petkovic, 2014), it was noted that "as a consequence of these funding limitations, screen production research programs risk remaining small and being sidelined as costly academic oddities" (p. 20). Students sometimes have to abandon their art projects and return to the conventional PhD thesis because of a lack of funds. The situation seems to be better in the UK, where the Arts and Humanities Research Council recognizes "creative outputs" and practice (2015, p. 9) as an "integral part of" the "research process" and considers sound, images, performances, films and exhibitions as research outputs.<sup>72</sup>

72 Research Funding Guide, Arts and Humanities Research Council. Retrieved May 31, 2015 from <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/guides/research-funding-guide/>.

## 7.5 Evaluation of the research process

Has this study then managed to provide answers to those research questions presented in Section 5.1? Have I convinced the readers that this examination is accurate and consistent and reflects the reality of doctoral students in art universities? Have I interpreted the empirical material in a credible manner? I had many goals and intentions at the beginning, for instance I would have liked to include a more extensive and in-depth examination of the general developmental issues in the Finnish university sector and to ponder how these are reflected in the experiences of individual doctoral students and in relation to the emergence of research in art universities. However, this would have broadened the scope of this study and required the interviewees' views on the topic.

To guarantee the credibility of the research, I committed the interviewees to the research process by twice sending the manuscript to them, requesting comments. In particular, the last reading produced invaluable opinions. Additionally, this study utilized the at-home ethnography method, which sets certain conditions regarding the researcher's position and expertise. The researcher is closely connected to the object of the research and the researcher's life experiences are part and parcel of the research, since he/she is expected to work within a research setting. Furthermore, in terms of at-home ethnography, there is a requirement for prolonged engagement. This method has also guided me towards asking the right questions and has afforded me the opportunity for "persistent observations". Korpiaho (2014) describes such a position as understanding the researched phenomenon from "within" and sees the researcher's involvement and "situatedness" as "an inseparable part of knowledge production and meaning making" (p. 52).

At-home ethnography brings certain risks, such as becoming overly involved in the study and presuming that ideas and views are irrefutable. (Alvesson, 2003) I recall such instances in the research process. To avoid such blind spots or to produce "a flattering view of oneself and the site of which one is a member" (p. 183) is best avoided by being as self-reflective as possible. Korpiaho (2014, pp. 54–55) has solved this by "triggering critical dialogue" on the research object and Alvesson (2003, p. 185) suggests drawing on theories that challenge common sense and accessing a broad range



of sources. To ensure this, I combined activity theory with writings on the development of research in art universities, as well as studies on doctoral education when interpreting the empirical material. Official documents, such as legislation, rules and regulations and recommendations, are widely cited to raise the issue of institutional aspects. Thus, information has been collected from different sources and reflects different points of view in the spirit of triangulation.

I have submitted the preliminary research results for peer review by participating in several conferences. The feedback received from these events has helped me to sharpen the inquiry and interpretation.

In Chapter Five, I described the progress of research as truthfully as possible. I used purposive sampling to guarantee that the respondents had enough relevant information on the topic. In the analysis, my intention was to stay as close to the interviews as possible and, therefore, I included many interview extracts in this report. Inevitably and thinking in retrospect, there are things I would have done differently. For instance, the interviews could have been more extensive and could have included a question on key events or turning points in the doctoral journey (see Veikkaila et al., 2012, p. 160).

## 7.6 Suggestions for future research

The need for future research is evident. Not all of the many phases of the doctoral process are presented here and, therefore, it is necessary to further analyse the process in more detail and to explore comprehensively and systematically the step-by-step development of doctoral projects in art universities. A longitudinal analysis, for example similar to that used in Hopwood et al.'s (2011, pp. 216–217) study, would produce additional interesting insights. This method consisted of logs written once a month, where students wrote about their everyday experiences and daily routines. Log data were supplemented by interviews. Also, Cotterall (2013, pp. 178, 185) preferred to take an in-depth look at the perspectives of a limited number of individuals and based her research on longitudinal narratives and multiple interviews.

Various surveys carried out at regular intervals would be helpful when gathering information on the needs and opinions and would highlight

problem areas. A major issue, which is only superficially handled here, is how research funding should be organized so that art universities could fully contribute to the requirements placed on them in various performance indicators and policy documents. This requires significant further research.

Clearly a point for further inquiry is the supervisor's perspective. To investigate it in parallel, students and professors' points of view would be beneficial. Recorded supervisory encounters (see Jazvac-Martek et al., 2011, pp. 17–18) were included in the original research plan but omitted when the focus of the research changed. Recordings would produce more valid material than retrospective accounts, where details may be recalled incorrectly and the past misrepresented to produce a socially desirable image. (Golden, 1992, p. 848)

Theoretically, it would be interesting to carry out an institutional-level analysis of the interaction between art and academia as two activity systems and how the integration of these systems generates change through contradictions. Such research should include an in-depth analysis on the development of resources and research funding in art universities.

An example of the significance of new technology and the digital media society is provided by the Times Higher Education, which in May 24, 2012 reported on Nadine Muller's Twitter post. She asked postdoctoral students, academics and students "What #phdadvice do you wish someone had given you earlier, before you had to find out for yourself". Within three days, she had received almost 500 responses and questions kept pouring in from the various PhD students' mailing lists. Muller claims that the number of responses shows that students are unaware of what is involved in a PhD and, in particular, many practical issues are left unanswered. Students do not dare to ask simple questions such as what are the processes of peer review, what do teaching assignments actually involve or how to give a conference paper. The Internet and Twitter offer "a more open and safe arena to ask delicate questions and get instant responses" than the environment students are used to. This demonstrates that sometimes very practical issues, those considered as self-evident, need to be addressed. Muller has opened a section entitled "the New Academic" on her web site to help postgraduates, early-career and established academics to share both good and appalling experiences and to reflect on their research practices. Moreover, Nick Hopwood's blog lists a

## CONCLUSIONS

number of practical tips from conference presentations to academic writing and supervision.<sup>73</sup>

As a final note, I must say that, like every doctoral journey, mine has given rise to “the terrible doubts and wanders down paths that go nowhere” (Grierson, 2012, p. 74). I hope to have highlighted the crucial aspects of doctorates in art universities. This is merely the first attempt and I do hope that it inspires future research, so that studies on the views and accounts of doctoral candidates will continue.

73 Retrieved December 23, 2014 from <http://www.nadinemuller.org.uk/category/the-new-academic/> <http://nickhop.wordpress.com>



# 8 ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this research is to determine how doctoral students in art universities experience the doctoral process and to highlight both the subjective perceptions and the context and circumstances of the doctoral path. The research crosses two fields, the emergence and development of research activities in art universities, on the one hand, and doctoral education, on the other.

The study seeks to provide a better understanding of what an artist-researcher is, to discuss the distinctive features of doctoral degrees at art universities, to demonstrate the various activities in which doctoral students engage along their doctoral journey, and to consider the different support structures for art dissertations that combine theoretical standpoints with the creation of artworks.

It is assumed that individual experiences are framed by and interact with institutional practices. Therefore, a socio-cultural approach, cultural historical activity theory, has been adopted as a theoretical frame for the research. This approach has offered a useful means whereby to examine the institutional and material aspects of doctoral studies.

The investigation is qualitative and consists of semi-structured interviews with artists involved in the audiovisual and performing arts. In addition, documents and literature on the development of research activities in art universities were examined. The interviews were analysed thematically and grouped into four themes: *motivation for doctoral studies*, *activities with the research object*, *discursive and material mediating activities*, and *new artistic agency*.

The opening theme outlines the motivation to undertake doctoral studies. The interview responses indicate that research interests and ideas often emerged from observations within artistic practice. For some, doctoral studies offered a break from daily artistic work and, for others, the theoretical orientation was already an integral part of their art-making. Within the theme, *activities with the research object*, I discuss art productions, documentation and writing, as well as how to create the necessary nexus between artistic practice and written reflection. Research-related art productions are usually very extensive and are time-consuming to complete, document and reflect on. Writing up the theses was not difficult for the interviewees in this study, which was contrary to what has been found in earlier studies. The most challenging aspect, however, was integrating the knowledge gained in art productions and the chosen theoretical approach into a coherent whole.

Mediating activities involve discursive and material aspects, such as

supervision and peer support, and account has to be taken of the research infrastructure and institutional conditions. In many policy documents supervision is considered to be of great importance for a successful doctoral path. However, the actual experiences revealed in this study only marginally support this official view – supervisory practices seemed to be unstructured though relatively unproblematic, and the relationship with supervisors was quite collegial. The methodology used in artistic research is an evolving one and this is why students need assistance from supervisors. When the productions are finished and the reflections phase has begun, especially when writing the final submission, students seek support to make the connections work.

At the other end of the support continuum are the peers, fellow artist-researchers and members of artistic teams. The importance of such activity supports the findings of Hopwood and colleagues (Hopwood, 2010a, b; Hopwood et al., 2011) concerning the significance of unexpected experiences and spontaneous interactions. In other words, doctoral students are relationally agentic, the interviewees in this study recognized and relied on a wide range of networks and other people as resources.

These notions on supervision and peer support are part of the wider environment in which doctoral research is realized. Research infrastructure, whether in terms of the space needed for art productions or simpler physical arrangements for the successful interaction with peers, seems to play a crucial role and to mediate the doctoral experience in an unexpected manner.

The final theme, *identity and agency*, was constructed on the basis of the question regarding how undertaking a doctoral degree affects the student's identity. Based on the interview data, the distinction between being either an artist or a researcher had vanished and doctoral students were comfortable with their current positions as artist-researchers. Some thought it was a privilege to be able to work simultaneously as artists and researchers.

The concluding chapter includes also recommendations for the further development of doctoral studies in art universities.





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# 10 APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

# Questions guiding the interview

1. Why did you apply to pursue doctoral studies? Can you name an influence?
2. Where have you graduated from?
3. What is the topic of your research?
4. At what point did the nomination of supervisors take place and were you familiar with them beforehand?
5. Please describe your work methods with the supervisor (how often did you meet, how did the communication occur, the number of students your supervisor had, did you talk about your artistic productions with him/her, the nature of feedback).
6. Do you know if your supervisors have been in contact with each other?
7. With whom do you discuss your research-related artistic works?
8. What do you think about the combination of art and research?
9. Can you describe your writing?
10. What about documentation?
11. Is there any support for productions?
12. How would you describe a good supervisor?
13. After your doctoral studies, do you feel more like an artist or a researcher?

## APPENDIX 2

# E-mail to the interviewees

Dear xx,

I'm conducting interviews on the supervision of artistic doctorates. The interviews form the basis for my dissertation for the Aalto University, the School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Department of Art. I'm employed at the same university in the Department of Film, Television and Scenography as a coordinator of research and doctoral studies.

I wonder if you have the time and interest to participate in such an interview? The interview will be informal and the topic is your experiences on the supervision of your research.

The interview lasts about one hour and it can be conducted at the most convenient location for you. I would be grateful if you would participate and if you could arrange time for it in the next few weeks.

Kind regards,  
Kirsi Rinne

[kirsi.rinne@aalto.fi](mailto:kirsi.rinne@aalto.fi)  
+358 40 592 9466

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FIGURE 1 ON PAGE 34 — The structure of a human activity system. After Engeström (1987)

FIGURE 2 ON PAGE 36 — Two interacting activity systems as a minimal model for the third generation of activity theory. After Engeström (2001)

FIGURE 3 ON PAGE 38 — Conceptualizing my research interest with activity theory: the first draft

FIGURE 4 ON PAGE 39 — Activity system of research in an art university

FIGURE 5 ON PAGE 40 — Artistic-academic activity system in doctoral education

FIGURE 6 ON PAGE 46 — Hybrid models by Biggs & Karlsson (2011b, p. 409)

FIGURE 7 ON PAGE 47 — Merging arts practice with academic research. An application from the previous page.

FIGURE 8 ON PAGE 69 — Research questions and research design

FIGURE 9 ON PAGE 90 — The thematic structure

FIGURE 10 ON PAGE 203 — The thematic structure and activity theory

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This thesis concerns doctoral studies in two art universities. It highlights the doctoral process, discusses the distinctive features of doctoral degrees at both universities and the context of the doctoral path. Doctoral studies are approached socio-culturally as activities in which doctoral students engage along their doctoral journey.

The themes include the motivation to undertake doctoral studies, various practices, such as art productions, documentation and writing, as well as how to create the necessary nexus between artistic practice and written reflection. The other part of the thematic structure deals with the support for artistic dissertations, which includes supervision, peer support and the research infrastructure.

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