

## Knowledge is the Answer. What is the question?

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The knowledge base that constitutes the actual making is often overlooked in research within humanities. One explanation for this might be what John Dewey defined as philosophers being obsessed with the problem of knowledge (Dewey 1958: 21) and which Richard Rorty would develop and problematize further in the book *Hopp istället för kunskap* (Rorty 2003). Maybe artistic and craftsman-like making is not appreciated as knowledge simply because these fields do not let themselves be described within the traditional concept of knowledge. It is sometimes hard to isolate what specific new knowledge is produced in artistic craft-making. But, as Rorty points out, knowledge is sometimes a limited and inhibiting way of looking at learning and understanding. Artistic craft-making may not produce documentable knowledge, but on the other hand it seems to be deeply engaged in other fields of understanding that may be just as important as knowledge. Examples of these fields are: Hope, compassion, understanding as such but also as understanding contradictions, spacial relationships, understanding relationships between body and space, past and present and the sensations of weight, color, form etc. (Graff 2007) Harvey J. Graff *Literacy*, Southern Illinois University Press s. 21)The aim of this paper is to provide impulses for further investigations in this field.

## KNOWLEDGE IS THE ANSWER. WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

*I want to examine my thoughts in action...*

*I want to do something in order to be able to think*

Mies van der Rohe

Not taking so much into consideration what knowledge is according to scholars on epistemology, but rather focusing on how knowledge is understood in everyday life and what effect this concept of knowledge have in practice this paper suggest that vital ingredients within artistic craft-making is left outside the concept of knowledge. Furthermore it claims that this concept of knowledge is inseparably connected to text as the dominating language for communicating and developing this knowledge. This knowledge through text also seems to favor a kind of thinking that leads to straight explanatory answers. This is sometimes a problem. The system is limited and often comes up with simplifying rational explanations while most big cultural issues, are very complex and often irrational. It seems often world politics and world economy is governed more by emotions than by knowledge.

This epistemological conflict between theory and practice is well known and very old. The debate has been going on ever since the division between knowledge and sensuous experience in Greece more than 2000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> But the search for a solution to the problem, a reunion of theory and practice, body and soul has almost always been made through the language of text, and furthermore text has been a part of the solution, has been made a part of the end result. The effect of the invention of abstracting knowledge through text is seldom problematized. It does of course occur all through history but it is remarkably rare and it is seldom highlighted in our contemporary discussions.

Within the fields of artistic research and tacit knowledge the problem of the division between theory and practice is often handled through trying to expand and change the concept of knowledge with the purpose of making room for other knowledges. The means for this project is often language in the form of words and text. The idea is to create new concepts in order to describe and make visible different sorts of practical knowledges.

Without a doubt there is a lot of interesting work being done within this field, yet the project is far from unproblematic. Describing an often wordless and almost always textless practice in words will inevitably have effect on this practice. It will be gradually textualized (Ong 1990) Muntlig och skriftlig kultur, Anthropos 1990. The effects of this textualization needs to be more critically examined.

To ask a nurse, a cabinet maker, or any other practitioner within the field of tacit knowledge, to reflect on his/ hers practice in words is to bring this practitioner closer to the traditional concept of knowledge mentioned above and, in doing so, he/she is distanced from the original practice. It works ( consciously or not) as a control system. The demand for reflection in text brings order in the classroom of epistemology. It means one more victory and a further strengthened position for abstract knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> The craft-makers lost their claim to the concept of knowledge when the ionic-thinkers, the natural philosopher's pragmatic, mechanistic and craft-manlike worldview was discarded by the Pythagoreans religious, mathematic and abstract understanding of the world. The early natural philosophers did not separate nature from technology. They were themselves often practitioners. This was before the slave system was fully developed in Greece. The increasing use of slaves later made it necessary for the Greeks to distance themselves from craft and other physical work through emphasizing the importance of the intellect and repressing body and matter. (Farrington 1965: 46).

## THE ONE EXCLUDES THE OTHER

Once (knowledge in the form of) text is introduced into a field of practice it tends to multiply itself. Within academia there seems to be a widely spread, and firm, belief in a sort of additive view on knowledge, meaning that all knowledge is good and the more you get the better. It seems urgent to problematize this standpoint. A few years ago Carl Malmstens verkstadskola, a highly prestigious school for carpentry, furniture design, guitar building and furniture renovation, was taken under the wings of this university. For the students who graduated this meant that they got an academic title. It also meant new courses. With the becoming a university level education comes the demand to adopt to the existing academic concept of knowledge. Now students in guitar building had to spend less time refining the craft of guitar building in order to get the time to study courses such as research methods and theory of science. This was one of the reasons why the head of this internationally renowned guitar building education choose to close down the education. He has now restarted the education outside the university environment with, it seems, an improved result. The student don't get any academic title and they now have to pay for their own education but they do get a more relevant education. The time aspect, though important here, is not the most severe effect that this adopting of alien knowledge conventions and tools have on a practice. Irrelevant or peripheral knowledge also seem to have the effect to turn the center of attention in new directions, which often leads to confusion (Josefsson 1991: 17,30). Another common effect of adopting to textual knowledge conventions seems to be that the number of points of views becomes fewer.

The driving force to understand and explain everything sometimes leads to ignorance. Questions like: What do we learn from this? in a school context, or in an art context; What does this mean? are destructive. These are a type of questions which completely misses the target and actually stands in the way of the learning and of the art experience. It is a Misunderstandings like these are most likely an effect of an over-textualized concept of knowledge. Along with text comes the demand and wish to understand it all, to explain, to search for answers. The driving force becomes the will to unveil secrets, to enlighten parts hidden in the dark etc. Within my field, interior design, it is often the very veil in itself, or keeping the secrets behind the veil secret that is meaningful, and enlightenment is interesting only in relation to darkening.

*Still confused but on a higher level*

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