Contested Qualities

Negotiating Value in Arts and Culture

Knut Ove Eliassen, Jan Fredrik Hovden and Øyvind Prytz (eds.)

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Quality matters

Knut Ove Eliassen, Jan Fredrik Hovden, and Øyvind Prytz

'Quality assurance' is the order of the day. More than a mere standardisation procedure, it has become a general management principle for everything from car manufacturing to dietary regimes, from ecology to social services, from holiday resorts to postal delivery. Whatever the nature of the transaction, it is likely to prompt a questionnaire beginning with a greeting affirming how much the service provider values 'your opinion', asking for just a few minutes of 'your precious time' to answer some questions. In the neo-liberal paradigm of governance, where citizens are consumers, commitment to individual propensities is the new catechism and consumer feedback the accompanying litany. Neither the world of art nor that of cultural policymaking has escaped the onslaught of the quality mantra and its protocols.

In the Scandinavian countries, the widely shared idea that art is a societal value was long the basic tenet of public support for art and of cultural policy, orientated by such guiding stars as 'the common good', 'aesthetic education', and 'democratic values'. The works of a nation's artists investigated, expressed, and celebrated the shared values and experiences of its culture – even, and maybe even more so, if the tone was critical. The old avant-garde notion that progress of the arts somehow prefigured progress of society was, in some form or another, generally held to be true. There was widespread consensus that even experimental works merited taxpayers' money – despite the incongruences between the aesthetic preferences of the cultural elite – occasionally disparaged as an elitist caste of cultural bureaucrats, self-appointed criticasters, and eccentric artists – and the popular taste of common people, always a decisive factor in social-democratic governance. A pragmatic distinction between the two symmetrical notions of *product quality* and *activity quality* helped to mitigate latent tensions between 'high' and 'low'. Introduced in the sixties, the two terms were associated with, respectively, the aesthetic products of the established arts and productions of popular culture. Referred to as 'an expanded concept of culture', this distinction established a truce between proponents of 'elitist' notions of aesthetic value and supporters of a 'democratic' ethnographic one, and proved

important for maintaining the shared Nordic Protestant credo of the blessings of a democratised culture.

Over the last two decades, demands of 'quality assurance', 'accountability', and even 'rentability' have challenged both the principles and the practices of the well-established Scandinavian systems for public funding of art and culture. Reflecting the crises of the governing principles of the welfare state, new success criteria such as 'user preferences', 'marketability', and 'investment returns' have been brought to the fore, supplementing and at times even supplanting the values of the previous regime of governance. 'Arts and culture', a formula once expressing self-evident values that were held to be the very building blocks of public consensus, seems to be dissolving into a multitude of activities whose social value is increasingly being determined by econometric protocols. Thus, public funding is in growing need of new legitimisation in order to gauge the satisfaction of the tax-paying patron. Against this backdrop, the contributions of this collection analyse and discuss the effects of today's ubiquitous quality concept for cultural politics, the arts, and aesthetic values in general.

New infrastructures

While the quality issue's topical nature can be understood only by considering the neo-liberal paradigm of governance's emphasis on protocols of standardisation, risk management, and accountability, the current situation also results from more profound changes. Large societal processes such as *globalisation* (immigration and the waning of the nation state), *informatisation* (the social realities of new media and the algorithms that inform our new computational habitat), and *capitalisation* (public poverty and the end of Keynesianism) have redefined the fabric of society to which the arts owe their existence. The nature and structure of what is labelled 'arts and culture' are substantially different from what they were only a few decades ago. If art is, as French sociologist Emile Durkheim once suggested, the way in which society represents itself to itself, massive rearrangements of social infrastructure will necessarily lead to massive transformations of what we mean and do when we speak about, practise, and consume art and culture. Although art might often function as a mirror in which we recognise and scrutinise ourselves, it does not operate outside the social fabric, but is integral to the social bond, the transactions and obligations which bind us together in a community.

Online user surveys and customer feedback services are the visible manifestations of increasingly aggressive information gathering about consumption patterns today, undertaken to monitor and anticipate consumer trends and attitudes. Companies like Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Apple – all

atop *Forbes*' list of the world's wealthiest companies in 2017 (with Facebook a respectable number 6!) – are not merely players in a rapidly changing arts and cultural sector, they also provide change-enabling infrastructure. Once, modern civil society's public sphere was an arena both for articulating conflicting views and for maintaining cultural identity, and a testing ground for aesthetic quality. The traditional division of cultural work – artist, critic, and audience – delivered the set-up for circulating cultural goods and formatted the forums – art venue, newspaper, and private sphere – for negotiating and propagating aesthetic standards. With the public sphere falling apart under pressure from the information society's platform economy, traditional venues for public feedback disseminate into Facebook groups, blogs, and web communities formatted by the algorithms of the software industry. In this light, the all-pervasive, if not downright invasive, automated quality protocols we encounter daily come across as synecdoches of a much larger process where the nature of the social bond is renegotiated, and with it art. The internet's closed-circuit societies and homogenising echo chambers seem poor substitutes for modern civil society's public sphere.

Art has reacted to these processes in various ways. What once could be identified, described, and analysed as a specific social sphere with its inherent rationality is not only more elusive, but also so multi-faceted that it challenges easy conceptual generalisations. In line with a general development described by sociologists as 'hyperdifferentiation' (Niklas Luhmann), art has been the site of ever-increasing specialisation generating a cornucopia of artistic subcultures, each with its own set of methods, forms of expressions, institutions, and specialised agents, and with its own aesthetic principles and evaluative heuristics. Insisting less on aesthetic autonomy than on the immediate political nature of what they do, many artists today thus are reluctant to resort even to fundamental concepts such as 'art' and 'aesthetics' to describe their practices. Rather than focusing on individually based object-producing activities, aesthetic work is thus often oriented towards collectively executed forms of mapping, exploring, and intervening in the shifting conditions of communities with which artists identify. This changed orientation indicates the considerable influence that identity politics has had on the art and culture sphere. If identity is not a given, handed down by birth, tradition, or history, but comes from aesthetic or political preferences, the social bond ceases to be understood as contingent upon places of origins or upon fate (historically, ethnically, religiously, sexually, etc.). To use the current aesthetic vocabulary, identity becomes 'minor', 'local', 'site specific', and 'negotiable'.

The seeming gradual disappearance of the idea of a shared culture – the vestiges of which have found an ironic afterlife in Europe's nationalist right-wing parties – suspends and voids ideas and notions that long were fundamental to establishing and maintaining shared aesthetic standards,

like 'common sense', 'tradition', and 'taste'. The foundations upon which aesthetic standards and their rationale were once established seem to wither away. From the cynic's viewpoint, the proliferating 'literature houses', festivals, and prizes and awards (with their accompanying ceremonies) are just manifestations of the new culture industry's need for differentiating, branding, and marketing its products to erstwhile readers of newspapers' arts and leisure sections. If this analysis holds, neo-liberal quality assurance protocols are far from external to the cultural field, but are part of the same restructuring of the social fabric that the arts have articulated and responded to since the debacle of post-modernism in the late seventies and early eighties. Whether and to what degree the appropriate answer to the new challenges of a restructured social field is to be found in standardisation and parameters for measuring quality are among the questions this anthology investigates.

What is meant by 'quality'?

From a more pedestrian viewpoint, these introductory reflections might smack of armchair sociology. A generously formulated common-sense objection could sound something like: 'This is clever and convincing, but what's wrong with insisting on quality?' 'Quality never goes out of style', as the Levi's jeans commercial once claimed. We appreciate quality; there is nothing wrong in establishing protocols to ensure it. After all, producing stuff does cost both time and money, and so does – importantly – consuming it.

As consumers, we appreciate quality. Then again, what is it that we appreciate? What is that particular factor that we refer to as 'quality'? The concept seems to have several meanings; it is fuzzy, ambiguous, or polyvalent. This variety of meanings should not preclude that there are things to learn from the ways the word 'quality' describes objects, activities, and experiences in our everyday parlance. Just as importantly, the word's ambiguity might offer some insight into the quality conundrum. For instance, does 'quality' as a predicate refer to the same thing in, for example, formulas like 'healthcare quality', 'paper quality', 'quality time', or 'quality entertainment'? Beyond its obvious positive connotations, its semantic contents evidently shift from one example to the next. Thus, the first two examples imply the existence of formalised standards for, respectively, healthcare and paper products, while the last two indicate quality experiences of a much more elusive, intangible, and emotional sort. More examples would yield more nuances. The word's meaning in non-technical usage is – not surprisingly – neither simple nor stable.

If colloquial usage offers little help in getting a firmer grasp on the essence of quality, maybe more systematic definitions might help. The Latin 'qualitas', a neologism created by Cicero, designated the 'what-ness' (ipseity)

of things. Thus, the online version of the Norwegian encyclopaedia, *Store norske leksikon*, informs readers that 'quality' refers to 'the way things exist, their composition'. An attentive reader will doubtless sense that the two-part definition reveals an ambiguity, or even a tension, that echoes the distinction between the tangible and intangible qualities we identified in everyday usages of 'quality'. The definition's first part insists on the singularity of quality: it is a mode of being, and thus essential to the way a thing exists. The second part moves the focus from essence to construction, because it emphasises the composite nature of things and how their distinct elements come together in a whole. The definition both refers to essential properties and designates the ways by which a whole exists. Hence, the concept may refer both to things themselves (their *what*), and to the way they are ordered (their *how*). As an afterthought, the same encyclopaedia adds an element to its definition. 'In all simplicity, quality is the ability to satisfy the customer's, or user's, demands or expectations'. That the previous sentence is in the online version but not in the encyclopaedia's 1980 edition is symptomatic of the recent changes in the discourse about aesthetic evaluation.

In another authoritative source, the Oxford's *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, the entry 'Qualities, aesthetic' is pragmatic and empirical rather than normative in its approach. It focuses on the historical and contemporary usages and definitions of the concept within aesthetic philosophy, hence the entry's use also of the plural form, 'qualities', rather than 'quality'. The plural hints not only at the many different positions one can take on the question of quality, but also at the term's inherent complexity. Acknowledging that little consensus exists among philosophers regarding the ontological status of quality (even the meaningfulness of the problem has been contested), the entry implies a widely shared agreement that aesthetic objects possess two types of qualities, 'primary' and 'secondary'. The first refers to properties such as solidity and extension, the second to those of colour and taste. Given this distinction, concepts of aesthetic quality usually draw on three premises: '1) that aesthetic qualities are perceived or perceivable; (2) that aesthetic qualities are value-relevant, that is, relevant as reasons for positive and negative judgements about the aesthetic (but not artistic) value of objects; and (3) that aesthetic qualities are tertiary, supervenient, or emergent, that is, dependent on primary and secondary qualities.' How these three premises interact, and how they are to be understood, has been the object of much philosophical debate, the complexities of which go beyond the scope of this preface. It is noteworthy, however, that the first criterion reveals an object dependency that regarding current art practices – such as conceptual or participatory art, where there is not necessarily a given object – might be challenged. The other two criteria show how the quality concept depends on being articulated as a function of, respectively, standards (value scales) and phenomenology (aesthetic experience).

Standards and aesthetic experience are long-time companions of the arts. Standards express tradition, its measures and idiom. Aesthetic experience originates in the work's aesthetic and emotional powers. The shared aesthetic values of the collective and the individual's receptivity and power of reflection converge in the faculty of taste – a concept referring both to individual propensities and to collectively shared ideals, and a concept ridden with many of the same ambiguities as that of 'quality'. To mediaeval philosophy we owe the old Roman adage, *de gustibus non est disputandum*, that is, it is pointless to discuss matters of taste, because personal preferences are merely subjective opinions and hence cannot be right or wrong. However, the insight that there always will be different and competing understandings of the nature of quality does not permit one to conclude that anything goes and that aesthetic issues evaporate into individual taste judgements – quite the contrary. An important lesson from the sociology of art – often associated with Pierre Bourdieu – is that tastes are anything but idiosyncratic. They are instead eminently social. Aesthetic preferences express standards, standards express values, and these values provide and shape communal identities (and vice versa) – an idea dating at least to Friedrich Schiller's concept of the education ('Bildung') of popular taste. What in a given context is referred to as quality is thus always debatable, whether 'quality' refers to how successfully a standard is met, whether the standard itself is appropriate in the given context, or finally, whether the values that inform the standard are acceptable or shared. Such discussions reveal a fundamental democratic element in aesthetic controversies. Evaluating a work of art can never be absolute. The evaluation is an appeal to share a specific perception of the world, to commit to a *sensus communis* – understood in the double meaning of a common sense and a common sensibility. A judgement of taste is thus not merely the expression of individual preferences – it inevitably expresses the social dynamics and diversity that are inherently part of art.

Protocols of quality

The entry 'quality' in the Oxford *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics* highlights the difficulties in claiming that aesthetic quality is an ontological given, that it is part of the material fabric of the world. In addition, the entry stresses that quality is the effect of certain standards applied in and relevant to a specific setting. Quality thus depends on context. The force of 'homonymy' – that the same word has different meanings – and the positive values associated with the term obfuscate the fact that quality concepts are synecdoches of standards that might very well be incompatible.

While 'quality' might be hard to standardise in the world of aesthetic production, the agents of manufacturing and marketing have a less abstract relationship to the issue. *Store norske leksikon*, the general encyclopaedia referred to above, informs readers that the 'quality of an item' at times is referred to as 'factory second', 'according to the established standards of said commodity'. The entry exemplifies the grading function of the concept, and its important role in the protocols of commodity production standards. The fundamental tenet of modern manufacturing is uniform quality, upheld by the distinction between acceptable and non-acceptable. Quality assurance procedures, for instance those proposed worldwide by organisations like the ISO, are codified to ensure and to certify that products meet established standards. On the basis of such standards, companies warrant their products' performance.

Serial products are not merely uniform in appearance. They are also expected to behave uniformly and according to expectations. Therefore, consumers will likely feel unhappy if products behave unexpectedly. Criteria of aesthetic quality are more complex. Components of aesthetic quality range from the artisan's skills and knowledge of tradition, by way of artistic expressivity and relevance, to originality and the ability to surprise. In other words, quality protocols involved in aesthetic evaluations by literary critics and art juries are clearly more complex than those for testing the durability of consumer goods. Artistic quality and industrial quality are not congruent concepts. While industrial commodities are standardised, cultural artefacts retain their specific aesthetic qualities from their specificity, because of their singularity. Their uniqueness resides in the ways they individually transcend established standards. However, whether or how this transcendence will take place cannot be determined before the execution of the work. 'Aisthesis' means 'sensual perception'; aesthetic singularity is thus necessarily established after the fact. This is referred to as the 'event' character of artistic production. Consequently, whenever there is a guarantee, there is no art anymore. The notions of guarantee and art are mutually exclusive.

Aesthetic judgements are integral to our everyday activities. We select movies according to preferences, moods, and the nature of our company, drawing on the knowledge we might have of genres and directors. We buy decorative posters or prints because they appeal to our aesthetic sense, or because they convey a contemporary feeling. And we go to exhibitions or museums to be pleased, educated, or simply to do something different. These activities originate in judgements derived from knowledge, experience, and a desire for aesthetic stimuli. They originate in specific taste regimes marked by education, interests, and trends. Moreover, they are commodified. The DVD, the poster, and the museum ticket are commercial objects. They serve specific purposes: entertainment, beautification, or diversion. In this sense,

consumption has an instrumental aspect. Dissatisfied customers might therefore choose to change their consumption patterns and avoid a genre of movies, decorate their walls differently, and prefer gyms to museums. Thus, if consumption habits are the keys, as it were, to understanding aesthetic quality, ultimately the issue is to create feedback loops between the seductive potential of the object, the cash register, and the client's desire to consume.

Can standards of taste go beyond patterns of consumption mapped by marketing companies through accumulation and analysis of big data? Never in the history of the market economy has there been so much information available about consumer preferences. The comparison of such everyday activities as going to the movies, shopping for posters, and visiting museums with, for example, musical competitions makes a few important differences appear that might prove helpful in more productively reformulating this question. Arbiters at music competitions have traditionally selected, rewarded, and encouraged young talents. Sociologically, as well as aesthetically, such competitions have served to uphold certain idioms and aesthetic standards. Unlike consumers of merchandise, arbiters must justify their evaluation using criteria that extend beyond their personal predilections. Furthermore, besides appealing to general standards, their assessment must convincingly articulate the winner's uniqueness. The delicacy of this issue becomes evident in the rather vague terms used to identify quality parameters in the guidelines for assessing excellence in artistic research in Scandinavian music and art academies.

Conventionally, the non-quantifiable nature of artistic productions is conceived of as integral to their singularity, their uniqueness. That good art contains an element of something 'je ne sais quoi' is fundamental to the idea of aesthetic epistemology. This requirement holds even for artistic works understood as a critique of aesthetic essentialism. Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, or Daniel Buren's striped awning canvas are famous examples of this critique. Here, the aesthetic gestures' singularity – their context, irony, or site specificity – provide a uniqueness that transcends the uniform and eventless nature of the industrial products that form the material basis of the works. A corollary of this claim is that aesthetic quality is not merely about the object's singular and unique nature, but also about a specific temporality, namely the fundamental openness that defines works of art as such. The aesthetic experience is an event, and aesthetic reflection is always after the fact. Hence, an artwork's quality is not to be anticipated, and cannot follow as the consequence of standardised production processes. Art schools teach skills and provide technical training, but not talent. Nor did their historical predecessors, the ateliers of the old masters, or the art academies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The idea that aesthetic quality is contingent upon the knowledge and qualifications of the audience does not necessarily mean that aesthetic judgements have no validity beyond their immediate contexts. While the appreciation of some works of art disappears with the aesthetic paradigm that brought them forth, others have outlived numerous aesthetic regimes and retained their appeal (though the nature of the appeal might have changed). Walter Benjamin once famously pointed out how artworks depend upon the technological conditions of their production and distribution. Thus, mechanical reproduction undermined the idea of an artwork's uniqueness, what the German philosopher calls its 'Einmaligkeit'. The term is often rendered as 'uniqueness'; however, the translation misses an important aspect of the German word, its temporality. What characterises a work of art is not only its singular existence in space, but also its singular existence in time – it cannot be copied without loss of aesthetic quality. Reproduction – that is, the production of identical series of objects – therefore changes the essence of the object. Quality protocols are fundamentally intended to make serial uniformity in production possible. Artworks' relations to their feedback into the production process must hence be fundamentally different from those predominant in commodity and service production spheres.

Historical concepts

Benjamin's remarks on the changes inflicted on our perceptions and notions of art by modern reproduction technologies – whether mechanical or electrical – yield the important insight that art, culture, and quality are eminently historical notions and that their history is contingent upon institutions, markets, and media, among others. Though one might hold that the three terms 'art', 'culture', and 'quality' must have some semantic stability, their meanings are nevertheless context-dependent. The present quality regime's influence thus reshapes and thereby fundamentally redefines the field of art and aesthetic practices and hence also its politics, economics, and discourses. The current investment in the quality concept in discourse on art and cultural politics partakes, in other words, in transforming the unstable objects and practices of arts and culture.

Neither the concepts of 'art' and 'culture' nor what they refer to are above the vicissitudes of historical change. It is a well-known locus in the history of arts and aesthetics that the arts, as a specific social world with its own distinct form of rationality and with a certain autonomy from the demands of wealthy patrons and the church, were the product of increasing specialisation and differentiation at the beginning of the modern age. Early-modern aesthetics were prescriptive and constructed according to principles and ideals of

classical rhetoric. In line with a principle from Antiquity – Cicero's *docere, movere, delectare* – the legitimacy of art resided in its ability to teach, to move, and to delight its beholders, readers, or listeners. This principle informed the teaching at the academies of arts from the Renaissance onwards. Characteristic of pre-romanticist aesthetics was the adherence to standards of taste that set expectations for any artwork. These prescriptive aesthetics, known as 'poetics', formed the backbone of 'academism', that is, the preservation of the skills and the idiom of 'the great tradition'. Quality was inextricably linked to an idea of craft. The artist was also an artisan. Before becoming an artist, one had to be an artisan, had to master the basic crafts of how, what, and when.

Romanticist and post-romanticist aesthetics dissolved the link between 'standard' and 'taste' – still defended by Enlightenment philosopher David Hume in the mid-eighteenth century. No longer arrived at by applying internalised standards, verdicts of taste now became, as Immanuel Kant famously formulated it, 'judgements without concept'. Aesthetic, non-conceptual understanding took on the nature of a distinct and autonomous way of knowing the world that reached well beyond the sphere of artistic production applicable to all aesthetic objects. Art was conceptualised on the basis of the individual experiences it generated in its audience. Accordingly, the old Tuscan proverb *Ogni pittore dipinge sé stesso* ('Every painter paints himself') took on a new meaning, now signalling the expressive nature of artistic production. This subjectivisation of the aesthetic experience – in audiences and artists alike – characterises modernity.

The romantic image of the artist as an isolated figure living in a sacred realm of art at arm's length from society was a product of the nineteenth century, and despite having lost much of its credibility, it survives through popular ideas of avant-gardism and of the visionary artist. Much like an inverted notion of the artistic genius, the modern concept of quality has become a problem that haunts the modern system of the arts. While gaining much of its momentum in a sphere distinctly different from the art sphere, namely that of industrial manufacturing and standardisation, the 'call for quality' can be seen as a belated response to the 'threat of idiosyncrasy' that was the shadow companion of romanticist art. Any judgement of taste can in principle be turned into a question of mere individual preference – and idiosyncrasy has indeed also sometimes been aesthetically celebrated as a sign of social and cultural distinction, as in the French 'dandyism' and the Italian 'decadentismo'.

The concept of quality rose to prominence with the increasing standardisation of industrial manufacturing at the turn of the nineteenth century, marked by the quality assurance protocols associated with the likes of Frederic Winslow Taylor and Henry Ford, as well as with institutions such as the British Standards Institution (1901) and Deutsche Institut für Normierung

(1917). In the production of items like chains, bolts, screws, or rods, the notion of quality does not designate their durability or their strength as such, but instead whether they meet given standards. Quality assurance can thus be defined as the establishment of procedures for maintaining standards in the production of tangible goods, to bring to market series of uniform products. From the consumer's viewpoint, quality thus came to take on the aspect of a naturalist concept. 'Quality' refers to the way things are and behave.

Formulas like 'trademark of quality' are telling traces of the new semantics bestowed upon the word. Unsurprisingly, this new semantics found an echo in the emerging and expanding market for art and aesthetic objects in the wake of the affluence generated by industrialism. For the better part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, artistic practices were object-oriented, producing artworks assessable on the merits of their material qualities and transformable into commodities. There is a fundamental – and much explored – relationship between modern art and capitalist economy, manifesting itself not only in the structural homology between the artwork and the commodity, but also in the fact that the two spheres both invested in the notion of quality. Thus, as many of the contributions in this anthology suggest, the idea of standards of aesthetic production seems motivated by a wish to ground the aesthetic product and even the experience of it in a naturalist notion of quality. Were this the case, would it be reasonable to see this as a way of anchoring the transitory nature of the aesthetic experience in something lasting, substantial, and thus also exchangeable? This brings us back to the striking affinity between the individual work of art and its commercial counterpart, the commodity.

Negotiating quality

Whether individual or collective, art is a social activity. Not only because artists engage with the works and ideas of both previous and contemporary artists, but also because much artistic production is done as collaborations or in artistic collectives. In addition, artistic and cultural objects and events often require large networks of people and institutions to make their production, circulation, and distribution possible. Thus, just to name an example, playwrights, actors, and directors cannot stage a theatre play without an army of associates – ticket takers, stage carpenters, cleaners, even audiences – and without certain material means of production – a venue, access, etc. The world of artistic production furthermore interacts with other agents in the cultural field, like art critics, cultural journalists, enthusiasts, cultural bureaucrats, grant committees, etc., and with other adjacent fields, notably software culture and its various social formats. Thus, not only critics pass judgements

about artistic quality – a wide variety of agents in the complex ecology of artistic and cultural production partake in assessing artistic value. The dividing line between insiders and outsiders can often be hard to discern, and this problematic is rapidly becoming an obligatory part of the self-reflexivity demanded of today's artistic practices.

In contrast to the old romantic notion of the intrinsic nature of aesthetic judgements, cultural sociologists have since long emphasised their complex social dynamics. A common claim is that aesthetic and artistic hierarchies express social forces, in other words, non-artistic values. Sociologically speaking, the aesthetic significance of a work of art can be approximated to its social value, the parameters of which may not merely be economic but also symbolic. Classifications of art and artists as having 'high quality' are in this perspective the expression of a social struggle where agents with different interests and backgrounds (consciously or not) try to invoke and enforce their vision of the artistic world. Such struggles can be seen as strategies of social closure where agents negotiate the boundary between art and non-art, artists and non-artists, qualified and un-qualified critics, etc. The dynamics of these negotiations change over time, due, among other things, to the entrance of new generations, new artistic ideas, new types of agents, and to technological inventions.

Classificatory struggles take place on very different levels. Sometimes they are tugs-of-war between cultural elites and elites in fields with competing social logics. Such conflicts become manifest in, for example, discussions on the purposes of artistic institutions and the question of whether these institutions should become more profitable or less political. Struggles also take place across and inside the different artistic spheres – for example, when committees are making shortlists for grants, a prize or a place in an exhibition. However, to claim that negotiations on quality or, more fundamentally, classificatory struggles over the shared idioms are always infused with power relations and interests is not to say that they are merely so, or that they are primarily strategic. That art is contingent upon political or economic factors does not preclude the existence of artistic values that go beyond being the mere reflections of their conditions of possibility. Moreover, such debates reflect the specific history and the specificity of each art field and artistic tradition, which often emphasise very different aspects of their art. While for example 'expressivity' is an important value in certain forms of music or in dance, it is largely irrelevant in others. Even a concept as central to Western art as 'originality' can be shown to be limited; for example, traditional crafts and music often emphasise adherence to tradition as a more important criterion of quality.

The dramatic transformations that the art field has undergone over the last fifty years have made traditional concepts of aesthetic discourses both

fuzzy and challenged. The massive theoretical and practical critique of such well-established concepts as 'art', 'work', 'author', 'artist', 'aesthetic', and many more, has changed the complex ecology in which artistic practices are embedded, thematised and understood, and thus also challenged the foundation upon which judgements of quality are passed. A consequence of the many anti-aesthetic impulses in the artistic realm in recent years is, for example, that the criteria upon which contemporary artistic interventions are evaluated are not necessarily – or only – aesthetic. Moreover, the criteria invoked are not necessarily applicable to concrete objects or to specific artistic activities. And finally, any evaluation is not automatically steeped in the conventional language of the arts (where categories like beauty and harmony have since long been discarded as irrelevant and ideologically charged).

The disappearance of the conceptual master tropes of art and the *lingua franca* of classical aesthetic has doubtless positively affected the diversity of the art scene. However, this has occurred simultaneously with increasing public demands for accountability, vocalisation and legitimisation, and not just vis-à-vis other artistic cultures and cultural intermediaries, but from outsiders in the state, businesses and politics. The flip side of the increasing cacophony of artistic dialects and the waning of arenas for establishing a common ground, the *sensus communis* invoked above, is that the art world has become more susceptible to various colonising discourses – the present demand for protocols of quality assurance being an all too obvious example. Here, the term 'quality' can meet the practical demand for some aesthetic pidgin that, with added gestures, can be taken to signify if not a shared meaning, then a willingness and an obedience (due to politeness, fatigue, or lack of resources) to observe contemporary rules of the value of art, even when these rules seem to increasingly come from outside the sphere of art itself.

On the origins of this book

This book results from the research programme *Perspectives on Aesthetic Quality in the Cultural Field*, instigated by Arts Council Norway and funded by the Norwegian Cultural Fund. Arts Council Norway is the main governmental operator for implementing Norwegian cultural policy, funding a variety of projects and activities within the performing arts, visual arts, music, literature, archives, museums, and more. The main criterion for this funding is – precisely – 'quality'. But what is quality? Constant self-reflection is a virtue, especially in organisations like the Arts Council that have the power to define what is deemed to be 'good' and not so good, and therefore a research programme was initiated to investigate what we talk about when we talk about 'quality'.

As mentioned, important changes in culture and society have – over the last decades – considerably influenced established aesthetic standards. Among the processes that have contributed (and still contribute) to challenging the common ground for aesthetic and cultural evaluations are digitalisation and new media habits, globalisation and multiculturalism, and the neoliberal trends in politics and public administration. Neither 'art' nor 'quality' is a static concept or phenomenon. Notions of aesthetic and cultural value change over time, and as new artistic and cultural expressions develop, established criteria for aesthetic and cultural evaluations and their accompanying conceptual tools must be investigated with respect to their current validity. We must, in short, rethink and renegotiate our aesthetic idioms, that is, the words and concepts we use to discuss and evaluate art and culture. The ambition of *Perspectives on Aesthetic Quality in the Cultural Field* has, in line with this, been to establish new knowledge about and to strengthen the critical discourse on the concept of quality. Furthermore, it has been an ambition to articulate the implied notions of quality operative today and thus to elucidate the foundation for making judgements of aesthetic and cultural quality. How are 'canons' established and how do they provide standards and idioms that can be used to assess the value of aesthetic and cultural practices? Which factors and processes are involved when art is evaluated? Is artistic and cultural value all about aesthetic quality, or are there other criteria or considerations involved as well, like power structures, gender, or regional politics?

In parallel with, and possibly as a consequence of, the disintegration of the common standards for aesthetic and cultural evaluation, there has been growing interest and attention in Norwegian (and international) cultural policy discussions – at least since the 1990s – regarding the question of quality. Although 'quality' was a concept in the earlier cultural political discourse as well, the introduction of New Public Management gave it a new importance and a new semantic content. Quality became a policy goal, and therefore fundamental for legitimising public funding of arts and culture, and, moreover, it came to be seen as a tool for measuring and ensuring the standard of the works, artists, and cultural expressions supported. Because of this development, there has been a call for more precise – preferably 'objective' – methods for assessing quality and for ascertaining whether public funding is used to produce as high artistic and cultural quality as possible, or that we, so to speak, receive value from the money invested. The ambition of *Perspectives on Aesthetic Quality in the Cultural Field*, however, never was to establish such methods. On the contrary, the project wanted to question if quantitative measuring of quality is even possible at all and to ask what the consequences are of making quality a core concept in discussions about arts and culture. How does quality work as a concept? Where does it come from? Which understandings of quality are prevailing today?

The research project has included a large number of artists and researchers from a broad range of academic fields, contributing to the discussion about quality with various aesthetic, methodological and theoretical perspectives. The project has, in other words, not sought one unifying answer to the question of quality. Given the concept's intangibility and the impossibility of clearly defining 'quality', *Perspectives on Aesthetic Quality in the Cultural Field* has actively encouraged a multitude of different – and possibly incongruent – answers. The project has resulted in three books in Norwegian: one collection of essays – *Når kunsten tar form* (When art takes form, 2018) – written by artists and others who deal with questions of aesthetic and cultural quality in their daily lives, and two research anthologies totalling almost 30 articles: *Kvalitetsforståelser* (Understanding quality, 2016) and *Kvalitetsforhandlinger* (Negotiating quality, 2018). The ten articles in this book have been translated from the two research anthologies: the contributions by Knut Ove Eliassen, Brita Brenna, Frederik Tygstrup, Tore Vagn Lid, and Anne Danielsen are all drawn from the first publication, while the contributions by Erik Bjerck Hagen et al., Ingrid M. Tolstad, Eivind Røssaak, Simo Säätelä and Trine Bille and Flemming Olsen are from the second. The different contexts in which they were first written account for the differening lengths of the articles.

Presentation of the articles

The two first articles in the book map the conceptual and historical backgrounds for the question of quality. **Knut Ove Eliassen**'s '"Are you new to Quality?" Some historical perspectives on the notion of *quality*' investigates how, over the last decades, 'quality' has become an important notion in an increasing number of areas, not only in arts and culture. In manufacturing, health, education, leisure, and many other sectors, 'quality' is today much like a rallying cry signalling dedication to the highest standards of professionalism, accountability and service-mindedness. Inextricably linked to the new paradigm of neo-liberal public management, quality control eventually has found its way into the arts and public support of the arts. In order to establish a critical perspective on this development, the article traces the conceptual history of 'quality' from Aristotle and Cicero by way of David Hume to Armand Feigenbaum's TQM (Total Quality Management) and ISO9000. On this background, Eliassen argues that two incongruent understandings of the concept haunt the semantics of the current aesthetic usage of the term. The result of this incongruity is a fundamentally ambiguous concept that, on the one hand, refers to an object's material properties, and on the other hand, to its experienced (subjective) qualities. In conclusion, Eliassen suggests that while the concept of quality certainly deserves a place within the aesthetic

vocabulary today, there is a wide array of other concepts more finely honed for assessing the specific properties of works of art.

In 'Literary quality: Historical perspectives' a group of five researchers – **Erik Bjerck Hagen**, **Christine Hamm**, **Frode Helmich Pedersen**, **Jørgen Magnus Sejersted**, and **Eirik Vassenden** – follow up the historical perspective and examine how the debate concerning literary quality has evolved over the last two hundred and fifty years. The article demonstrates how cultural consensus and canonical stability have grown weaker, and how today it has become commonplace to situate literary evaluation in a context defined both by the given historical moment and by issues of gender, class, and ideology. Still, despite the historical vicissitudes, the debate has proven remarkably stable – both as regards the kind of literature being held in high esteem and as regards the criteria being used to justify literary greatness. There exists a continuous dialogue about these matters going back at least to the mid-eighteenth century. Thus, while noting that notions about quality have certainly been modified throughout the years, the authors claim that these transformations have not fundamentally changed the idea of quality as such.

The next two articles examine 'quality' in relation to broader tendencies in contemporary culture, the one focusing on participation culture, and the other algorithmic culture. In 'Quality and participation in museums' **Brita Brenna** demonstrates how the concept of 'participation' has gained momentum also in the museum sector. While funders ask for public participation to legitimise their support, and museums work hard to instigate such participation in their various activities, museum literature is concerned with discussing different modes of participation. Participation has, in short, become a parameter of quality in museums, an indicator of whether the activities going on are good and important. However, what 'participation' actually means and measures varies widely. Brenna's article analyses different ways in which participation has been framed in museums, and it considers different ways to assess and evaluate it. What might 'museum quality' be when we are discussing processes rather than museum objects? How do we get beyond measuring participation as something deemed good in principle? Taking its cue from the discussion on participation in socially engaged art, this article proposes to move the concept of participation out of a discourse of the socially good and towards a new understanding of museum objects.

Frederik Tygstrup, in 'Culture, quality, and human time', starts out by asserting how two distinct sets of criteria for quality are operative in modern assessments of arts and culture: one based on success in the marketplace, and one based on evaluative norms pertaining to specific historical expert cultures. These criteria have traditionally been associated with popular culture, on the one hand, and 'high' art, on the other. Today, Tygstrup argues, the balance between the two sets has been displaced: digital interaction and feedback

modelling has radically enhanced the tools for optimising cultural commodities and have enabled a smooth provision of tailored services to precisely defined market segments. The expert criteria, here heuristically summarised as adhesion to tradition, conscious innovation, and formal coherence, are being increasingly delegitimised in this process, together with the bourgeois aesthetic culture from which they stem. To facilitate a polemic confrontation between the two sets of criteria – rather than simply to take note of the demise of the second in favour of the first – Tygstrup proposes to position them in a broader anthropological framework and, more specifically, to gauge their respective relation to the human experience of time. On this basis, he maintains that criteria of quality can be reassessed in terms of how art and culture contribute to the development of social habits, confronting habits that are based on repetition, and habits that are based on transformation.

The following three articles all examine how different notions of quality are negotiated in specific artistic practices. In her article '"That was bloody good!" On quality assessments in artistic work processes' **Ingrid M. Tolstad** starts by pointing out how discussions on quality traditionally tend to focus on artistic expressions already made public. Tolstad is instead concerned with creative work *processes* and how quality is assessed and negotiated on the way towards the artistic product. The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork both in a commercial songwriting camp and in an experimental theatre group. This approach makes comparison between different artistic practices possible: while the songwriters work with the intention of producing at least one new daily, the theatre group actively explore how they might manage to lose themselves on their way towards the performance they eventually will put on stage. Both groups continuously switch between what Tolstad calls a 'flow mode' and an 'analytical mode'. In flow mode, the quality assessments are immediate and of a bodily nature – does it make you tap the rhythm, sing along, laugh, or spontaneously shout out your enthusiasm? In the analytical mode the group members discuss whether and how the different expressive elements might affect listeners and audiences, and what effects they might produce in the broader field of culture. Tolstad shows how the work processes unfold as ongoing quality negotiations, where differing understandings of quality continuously intermesh and collide. Pointing to how the actual *term* 'quality' is seldom used in the creative processes observed, an argument is made for a greater concern with how understandings and assessments of quality are *experienced* and *performed* by producers of art and culture themselves.

Eivind Røssaak looks in 'The emergence of the curator in Norway: Discourse, techniques and the contemporary' at the fundamental changes that took place within the visual arts field in Norway in the 1990s. Aesthetically the expressions went from modernism and the painterly to a wide variety of new techniques and exhibition practices related to what was referred to as

the new 'postmodern landscape', or, simply, 'the contemporary'. Røssaak's article explores how these changes emerged by focusing on a rather under-researched figure in the artistic landscape, namely the curator. The independent curator appeared in Europe with the famous (and notorious) Harald Szeemann and his *documenta 5* exhibition in 1972. In Norway, however, the term 'curator' appeared in this field only in 1996 with the first independent exhibition organised by the Young Artists Union (UKS) and curated by Ingvill Henmo and Jon-Ove Steihaug. Røssaak's article analyses this and two other exemplary exhibitions in Norway where the curators self-reflexively articulate and reframe both the artworks and the underlying notion of aesthetic quality. Thus, the study demonstrates how – in relation to new artistic practices – a new quality paradigm can come into prominence, and how specific agents contribute to this development. The article argues that the 1990s witnessed something close to a paradigm shift with regard to quality in the visual arts field in Norway. Today, the article warns, the landscape is shifting again because of new technological and economic developments taking place as more and more art institutions turn to new management strategies. The independent curator's role in this process is an uncertain one.

Tore Vagn Lid's article is titled 'The dramaturgy of quality concepts: From describing to prescribing (stage) art', and it takes as a starting point the fact that one and the same stage production, experienced at the same place and the same time, can be given two radically different reviews, two completely different assessments of the production's artistic merits or, rather, qualities. This disparity might be in the nature of art criticism, and can be seen as the expression of the critics' subjective taste. However, Lid's article asks whether it is possible to examine the conflicting judgements – or the judges themselves – in more depth. Which qualities of a given production are perceived, articulated, and conceptualised, by which critics, when, and on what grounds? By asking such questions, Lid points to the tensions inherent in the artistic field, and he demonstrates how the circulation of certain quality concepts, at a certain point in time, can be seen in relation to the interests of specific agents. Quality concepts, the article argues, can be used to position oneself in the artistic field. In line with this, the ambition of the article is to grasp what Lid describes as 'the dramaturgy of art concepts'. This means focusing on how various notions or conceptualisations of quality feed back into and influence the production of dramatic art, restricting what kind of plays can be staged and, in the end, communicated to the audience. Reflecting on the dramaturgy of the concept of quality is thus not something which should be done alongside, above or outside artistic practices. It should be, as Tolstad hints at as well, a central to any artistic practice.

The final three articles in the book all analyse different aspects of aesthetic evaluation. They discuss criteria, ask what characterises legitimate aesthetic

judgements, and examine whether it is possible to develop objective methods for measuring quality. **Anne Danielsen**'s article, 'Novel, expressive and skilled! Understandings of quality in three popular-music genres', analyses and compares quality parameters in three genres of popular music: electronica, indie and blues. The differences inherent in the specific notions of quality found in the three genres are discussed in light of the values expressed by the major actors in Norwegian cultural policy, notably Arts Council Norway, in their assessments of musical productions. Danielsen finds that the three parameters, 'novelty', 'expressivity', and 'skilled musicianship', have different values in all the genres involved. While 'expressivity', for example, is regarded as a quality in indie, it has no value in electronica. To assess the quality of a certain musical expression, therefore, a kind of specialist competence is needed. Danielsen thus identifies a central dilemma in all quality assessment: on the one hand, the need to experience and evaluate every artistic expression on its own premises, and on the other hand, the need to compare and evaluate across genres, across the uniqueness of the specific work and the criteria of the genre to which it belongs.

Simo Säätelä, in his article 'On quality judgements in art: A conceptual investigation', looks at the concept of quality and how, in its well-established use, it can be described as a relational and relative concept, defined in terms of criteria and preferably in relation to a standard. However, when applied to art, 'quality' is often used in an *absolute* sense, as referring to something with unique value, something that evades comparison. Säätelä seeks a solution to this dilemma by referring to David Hume's classic essay *Of the Standard of Taste*. According to Säätelä, Hume shows us what kind of standards we can have when it comes to quality judgements in art, and also how we can make meaningful quality judgements even in situations where reaching agreement on criteria is difficult or impossible. In this way, Hume's *Standard* can be read as a philosophical defence of the so-called arm's length principle. The point of a 'standard of taste' is that it gives the evaluation of quality in art a kind of objectivity that is lacking in mere judgements of taste. It tells us which aesthetic judgements we *should* accept as exemplary. Hume thus shifts the question of quality from criteria to the question of *who* is competent to assess or rank the inherently unique objects. Objectivity in quality judgements depends on the existence of 'ideal' critics who make decisions we can acknowledge as *guiding us* towards valuable experiences. Some of the discussions about quality will therefore be about whom one should accept as an expert judge. Quality in art cannot be verified or proved, but the critic who is able to persuade the interested and serious reader is ultimately the one who is 'right'.

In 'Measuring the quality and impact of arts and culture', the last article in the book, **Trine Bille** and **Flemming Olsen** investigate the opposite position: they ask whether it is possible to develop methods for quantitatively

measuring quality in the arts and culture. The article discusses critically two major projects from Australia and England, namely *Measuring the Quality of the Arts* and *Quality Metrics*, where the aim is to measure the quality of a wide range of exhibitions, performances, and events at different cultural institutions. The quality assessments here are based on a number of quality indicators, which are evaluated by the audience, the artists themselves, and peers. Bille and Olsen, however, point out different problems with these quality measurements, with regard to both the indicators and the audience's assessments. It is questioned whether this type of quality assessment can be used for purposes beyond legitimisation. In conclusion, cultural policy implications are discussed, and it is argued that if politicians and administrators want a more informed basis for conducting cultural policy, examinations of effects on an individual level will be more interesting.

‘Are you new to Quality?’

Some historical perspectives on the notion of *quality*

Knut Ove Eliassen

A noteworthy feature of the present discourse on aesthetic quality is the absence of historical perspectives.[1] Whether as part of the conceptual toolbox of policymakers or as an issue in the debates of the general public, the notion of aesthetic quality is generally taken for granted and rarely problematised as such. The term is taken as simply denominating a given ontological fact; apparently, quality exists as part of reality. Twenty years ago, things were perceived differently. A major concept in management and business studies since the 1970s, the quality concept gained popularity in the sphere of public administration towards the turn of the century. The debates of the 1990s provide ample proof of the concept’s contentiousness at the time.[2] There was a widespread awareness that the term, for better or for worse, was linked to the new principles of governance referred to as New Public Management.[3] Its topicality was clearly understood as contingent upon a contemporary political context and as a symptom of an ongoing shift in principles of governance.

Today, the explicit political context of quality debates of the 1990s has been eclipsed by new frames of reference that draw less explicitly on an ideological agenda, but instead stress the economic implications of the introduction of quality assurance regimes within the art and culture sectors. Expressions such as ‘cultural entrepreneur’, ‘cultural business network’, and ‘culture production’ have become increasingly frequent in the parlance of cultural policymakers.[4] This shift from an ideology-driven discourse to the more

1 The title is taken from the homepage of American Society for Quality (ASQ).
2 This is confirmed by a search for ‘quality’ using the National Library of Norway’s search engine NB N-gram: www.nb.no/sp_tjenester/beta/ngram.
3 See for example Bjørkås 2001, p. 44 and Lund et al. 2001.
4 See for example then State Secretary Knut Olav Åmås in a speech from January 2014: www. regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/kulturnaringer-privat-kapital-og-regjeri/id749992/ (downloaded on 30 November 2015).

matter-of-fact pragmatics of quantification, quality assurance, and rentability is a common trait of the changes that have marked the cultural politics of the Scandinavian countries since 2000. The current interest in 'quality' and various protocols for quality assurance in the sphere of public art support is thus part of a general reorientation in the governance of culture from value-driven politics to a neo-liberal market-oriented politics.

A closer look at the history of the concept of 'quality' reveals how it made its first appearance in Norway's political discourse on culture in the 1970s. In line with the increasing prestige of social anthropology in the 1960s, a new notion of culture had gained popularity in Europe and had an immediate effect on the political discourse on art and culture. Its particular Norwegian expression was the hotly debated 'expanded concept of culture' ('utvidet kulturbegrep') introduced circa 1970. Accompanied by a conceptual distinction central to policymaking over the following two decades, two symmetrical notions, *product quality* ('produktkvalitet') and *activity quality* ('aktivitetskvalitet'), began to feature prominently in reports to the *Storting* (Parliament) as part of strategies to establish a politically acceptable differentiation between 'high culture' and 'popular culture'. In the following decade the two concepts were central to the cultural governance vocabulary and played a central role in social democratic cultural policymaking in all three Scandinavian countries, proving to be important tools in a much called for democratisation of culture.

While what was actually meant by an 'expanded concept of culture' and the concept 'activity quality' (de facto a euphemism for 'popular culture') was a recurring and often hotly debated theme in political and public debate, the civil authorities made few attempts to give a precise definition to the content of high culture: aesthetic quality remained the purview of artists, critics, and art councils, not politicians. Moreover, the principle of 'arm's length' imported from Britain meant that the allocation of public art support was in the hands of the representatives of the art world and their organisations. The advent of the neo-liberal paradigm of governance, and a concept of quality culled from business studies rather than from ethnography ('aktivitetsskvalitet') and aesthetics ('produktkvalitet'), meant a shift from a cultural politics determined by governmental initiatives to a market-oriented one.

What follows is an attempt to provide the present discourse on quality with a much-needed historical dimension by tracing the historical transformations of the *concept* of 'quality' from the philosophy of Antiquity up to modern productivity and management theory. Three stages in the history of the concept stand out: they can for the sake of simplicity be labelled under the headings of 'philosophy', 'aesthetics', and 'business studies', belonging, respectively to Antiquity, Enlightenment and modernity. The conceptual developments taking place in these three periods inform the semantics that dominate the

present discourse on quality. A quick glance at its many contexts reveals that the concept has particularly flexible semantics. Its rich history shows how problematic it may be to speak of quality *per se*, but also how the significations that have emerged throughout history appear to cling to the concept, still dominating its meanings in today's debates on aesthetics and cultural policy.

Quality assurance

Everyday experience tells us that ours is the age of quality assurance. Twenty-first-century consumers can hardly conduct a transaction without being confronted with a request to assess the quality of the service provided. Whether we deal with a bank, a car workshop, or a travel agency, the quality of the product or the service rendered must be evaluated – knowledge of customer satisfaction might be a decisive resource in a competitive market. Moreover, internet companies like TripAdvisor, Amazon.com, and IMDB have made a business out of the quality assessments of twenty-first-century consumers.

It might be worthwhile to dwell briefly on what is meant by 'quality' in the various contexts in which the term is currently being employed. Even if the protocols might be quite comprehensive, the quality criteria applied to a specific product or to a particular purpose (so-called *functional* quality) are usually self-explanatory – whether being about energy-certifying a house, a food product's provenance and purity, or a car part's durability. It might be more of a challenge to understand which procedures determine quality in non-material contexts, such as leadership, environmental issues, or caregiving. In addition, it is of course even less obvious in the arts and the cultural sector where the criteria are complex, floating, and subjective. There is little doubt that protocols involved in aesthetic evaluations done by literary critics and art juries are more complex than, say, quality protocols involved in testing the durability of IKEA furniture. The components of aesthetic quality range from the artisan's skills and knowledge of the tradition, by way of artistic expressivity and relevance, to originality. To make things more complex, artistic and aesthetic quality are not congruent concepts. While jury members may agree that a particular production has high artistic quality and reveals the artist's skills and gifts, it may still be criticised for being exclusive, or even exclusionary. An obvious example is conceptual art. Not only does it require significant prior knowledge on the part of its public, but both *concept art* and its younger relative *relational art* are aesthetic practices where the aesthetic object plays a subordinate role, and hence may lack any physical qualities. In *performance art*, *actions* are the point of departure, and the outcome is not a given, but is rather a function of the public's reactions. Nevertheless, a considerable number of performances have not only been considered successful,

but their artistic *qualities* have been analysed; some have achieved legendary status as art works of *high quality*. If nothing else, what these two examples from the contemporary art scene illustrate is, first, that 'quality' is dependent on a complex set of relations, and, second, that the question of whether quality can or should be assured is not obvious in all the contexts.

Quality is a concept

That 'quality' does not refer to an absolute, but depends on a set of standards, should hardly be controversial. Rather than representing an already given object, the concept produces reality by referring to given standards that imply attributes such as durable, waterproof, soft, etc. In contrast to such words as 'stage', 'canvas', and 'guitar', 'quality' refers to phenomena that have no existence in themselves. Nonetheless, there is in everyday parlance a tendency to use the word as if it in fact designates something that is both well-defined and particular (although, strictly speaking, most would probably agree that the word designates an abstraction). There is a widespread and mystifying idea that 'quality' exists, and thus that the word designates an ontological reality recognisable whenever encountered.

One way to demystify 'quality' would be to analyse the term as a *concept* rather than as a *word*. This distinction is of course technical and analytical, and thus not of an absolute nature. To analyse the pragmatic reality of 'quality' one has to trace the ways it is being used and the contexts in which it is operative. Treating a word as a concept thus means to define it in its specific relations to other words, that is, in context. Per definition, contexts are coherent, but they are also subject to changes. Thus, on the one hand, as part of a specific context, concepts have a systematic aspect. On the other hand, they have a historical aspect, as the ways concepts are systematised change over time.

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once observed that concepts, like people, have a history, and that both fail to withstand the ravages of time. Concepts come into the world in situations that characterise them. Not merely labels of that which surround us, they also express our ideas, and therefore bear the marks of our interests and standards. Thus, concepts are necessarily bearers of value judgements. *Quality* is an obvious example of a value-charged concept precisely because it designates a *distinction* between something that has a specific property and something that does not – a dividing line established by more or less articulated criteria. In contrast to other aesthetic concepts such as *expressivity*, *authenticity*, or *reflection*, *quality* stands out by being unambiguously defined in terms of an overriding scale.

Concepts are tools for organising reality. They place objects, systems, and processes in a context and furnish them with a direction, a purpose,

and a temporality. Concepts articulate our experiences with the world, but also create expectations as we project our concepts onto what we expect to encounter. They project what philosophical hermeneutics calls *prejudices*, that is, accumulated experience and knowledge. Thus, concepts are instruments not only of understanding and judgement, but also of planning; they set the frameworks and standards we use in our encounter with the new. Reality depends on conceptualisation to emerge as a viewable object, and thus to be imbued with meaning. What the historical reflection on concepts can teach us is that concepts come to us burdened with a prehistory. They exist in constellations with other concepts in ways that are not immediately transparent (for instance in the way quality always brings up the concept of quantity).

The quality concept in the philosophy of Antiquity

'Quality' stems from the Latin *qualitas* ('nature', 'quality', or 'state'). It originates in the language of classical philosophy. It is a trueborn child of Cicero's ambition to create a proper Latin vocabulary of philosophy by systematically translating the philosophical terminology of the Greeks. *Qualitas* is his Latin rendering of Aristotle's *poión*. The word is constructed on the adverb *quale*, that is, 'thus' or 'in what way', in the sense that something *is* 'durable', 'genuine', or 'hot'. As a noun, *quale* designates a given object's defining characteristics, such as round, flat, hard, etc. This ambiguity, the concept being both modally determined (referring to a given relation or a standard) and absolutely determined (as an absolute quality), has since then haunted the term. It must also be mentioned that Cicero also coined *quantitas* (from Greek *posón*) – thus giving rise to one of the most important conceptual pairs in the Western tradition, quality and quantity.[5]

Even if the words *poión* and *posón*, 'quality' and 'quantity', also occur in early Greek philosophy, as technical terms they go back to Aristotle. He defines quantity as that which is measurable. Quantity is difference in terms of weight, length, or number; quality on the other hand is difference in terms of properties. Moreover, Aristotle distinguishes between difference in the sense 'contrary to' and difference as relative to the 'intensity' of a given sensation. The first category includes the differences that exist between colours (black and white, red and green) or geometrical figures (round or square, simple, and complex). Intensity conversely means differences of level (cold and hot, slow and fast). Importantly, quality can also describe the characteristics of people, such as character features, or it may designate latent charac-

5 The following review is heavily indebted to 'Qualitas' in Ritter 1989.

teristics of an object (the ability of the seed to germinate). Aristotle identifies four types of quality: 1) characteristics of an object that can be sensed, 2) external gestalt or figure, 3) habitus or disposition, and 4) a nature-given internal property.

Aristotle's conceptual innovations were essential to ontology, natural philosophy, and theory of knowledge for the next 1500 years. To the legacy passed down from Aristotle belongs the opposition between quality and quantity, between internal and external qualities, between the unique and the comparable, etc. Following Aristotle, the atomists contributed to the further refinement of the concept by distinguishing between the absolute properties of things and the properties that were transitory in connection with their sensory qualities. Stoic philosophy considered qualities as non-corporeal phenomena, and as such, something that existed separately from the corporeal or substantial existence of things. The distinction stemmed from the deduction that only substances can be determined as active or passive; qualities, on the other hand, can be neither active nor passive; they are only properties of the substance. The Late Antiquity philosopher Plotin develops the distinction between *specific* difference and *accidental* quality, that is, between substantial form (what the thing *is*) and accidental quality (how we *perceive* it to be). Hence, quality becomes a concept for the accidental and epiphenomenal, for the external and secondary properties of things.

Thomas Aquinas, the scholastics, and more generally, the Aristotelian tradition of the Middle Ages further developed the difference between essential and accidental properties. 'Quality' became a useful term in dealing with difficult issues of religion and theology. It thus played a major role in the dispute on the nature of the sacraments. The challenge of understanding the relationship between the bread and the wine as carriers of the body and the blood of Christ, or of understanding bread and wine simply as bread and wine was articulated by help of the notions of substantial and accidental quality. Quality thus played a major role in establishing an absolute divide between the theology of the Mother Church and the theologies of the Reformed churches. For the former, the bread and the wine of the Eucharist were nothing less than the veritable body and blood of Christ. For the latter, the bread and the wine maintained their substantial qualities as bread and wine throughout the ceremony, with the Lord only symbolically or spiritually present in them.

Quality and quantity

The distinction between 'quantity' and 'quality' plays an important role in Medieval philosophy, or more precisely, in the schoolmen's ontological differentiation between an object's 'thingness' (*quidditas*) – for example whether

the object is one or many, unified or diverse – and its appearance or 'whatness' (*quoditas*) – whether the object is big, little, warm, cold, solid, frail, etc. This differentiation allowed for the distinction between primary and secondary sensory qualities, and between senses that perceive an object as such, and those that perceive the different ways an object may appear. Thus, the senses could be ordered in two classes: tactility, which sensed the thing, and the other senses that sensed the thing's sensorial aspects. Tactility was the only sense that allowed access to the substantiality of the world, while the other senses were understood as perceiving that which was secondary and fleeting (and thereby vulnerable to the simulacra of the Devil). This development is important because it opens for a *subjective* component in perception by distinguishing between the thing as sensed by all as 'thing', and the thing as sensed by a given individual in a given state – for example, over time with varying degrees of intensity. A subjective – or to use a modern term, 'phenomenological' – aspect was thus bestowed upon the sensory qualities. Quality was shifted from the object to the subject's perception of it.

The differentiation between primary and secondary qualities is the underpinning for the modern terminological differentiation between objective and subjective qualities. Central to early-modern scientists such as Galileo, and to the seventeenth-century champions of the Scientific Revolution, was the insight that physical reality and perceived reality were not necessarily congruent. The new optical technologies of the telescope and microscope demonstrated how a human's sensorial experience and hence knowledge of the world is in fact a result of the limitations of the sensory apparatus. The senses are not open passageways between the mind and the outer world, but rather filters with limited bandwidth (a fact later to be refined by nineteenth-century phenomenology: perception is the act of reducing sensorial input). The qualities we perceive are not properties of the things but rather products of the work of perception. Hence, qualities do not exist independently of perception, and the word 'perception' designates sensory impressions rather than the realities behind them. This insight redefined the very premises of scientific epistemology. Sensorial data could not necessarily be trusted as sources of information about physical reality, because the perceived qualities of the world of objects were not necessarily congruent with its true physical nature (hence the seventeenth-century fascination with visual illusions such as the rainbow, the aureola, and the Fata Morgana). Thus, it was recognised that true knowledge of the properties of things could not be based solely on the perception of their qualities but had to be grounded in the measuring of the way they behaved under given circumstances (i.e., independently of the individual sensory apparatus and the subjective judgements of an individual). In the sciences, measuring instruments and laboratories were therefore

gradually replacing the human sensorial apparatus in determining the actual properties of the physical world.

'Mathematics is the alphabet with which God has written the universe.' Ascribed to Galileo, the statement is often taken as a motto of the pioneers of the Scientific Revolution. Mathematics is here the most important instrument for determining the objective qualities of things. Whether in optics or ballistics – two early prestige disciplines – it is the quantifiability of physical properties that makes it possible to calculate and predict their behaviour under given conditions. The general lesson drawn from these new sciences was that the world could be calculated – predicting the range of a gun or the refraction of a lens are simple examples of a principle that could be extended to the entire material world. Differential equations made it possible to calculate the complex and imperceptible; changes in water currents and the tension in the springs of a clock could be measured and calculated. Even the colours, one of Aristotle's foremost examples of absolute qualities, became a phenomenon of refraction and could thus be translated into mathematics, thanks to Newton. The fact that the world could be quantified allowed rational predictions about the future to be made – which also became a fundamental premise for political economy, from its pioneers Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo to today's theorists of high finance. Predictions arrived at using statistical analysis made it easier to govern society and to avoid the unexpected, in other words, to avoid risk. (As the name reveals, 'statistics' was the original science of the state.) Calculation, the discipline of quantities, thus in a roundabout way became the foundation of quality assurance.

Standards in early aesthetics

The story of the quantification of the world is well known, and this is not the place for such a long narrative.[6] The success of quantification sprang from the discovery that perceived qualities did not necessarily correspond to real qualities, and thus were of limited value as the basis for predictions. The discovery of the sensorial apparatus' shortcomings explains one peculiar feature of eighteenth-century science, the flourishing of studies on how the blind, the deaf, and the sick perceived the world. The interest dedicated to the sensory-deprived and to the peculiarities of how they perceived the world was thus less the fruit of a philanthropic impulse than of the new epistemological insights of the Scientific Revolution: the recognition of the inadequacies of the sensory apparatus. The philosopher Denis Diderot

6 Liedman 2013, p. 28.

symptomatically entitles his pioneering study on blindness 'A letter about the blind to the benefit of those who see'. Thus, quality wanders from philosophy into perception physiology. Along the way, the concept loses its ontological character as it is reframed as a psychological issue.

The quality concept's migration from ontology to psychology, and from the solid world of things to the more fleeting realities of the mind, is illustrated by a famous eighteenth-century debate on aesthetics. The central question was if it was possible to claim universally valid judgements of taste. In the essay 'Of the standard of taste' (1757), British philosopher David Hume posed the simple question: Is there such a thing as an absolute yardstick for measuring the inherent value of works of art that goes beyond individual and therefore idiosyncratic preference? And would such a standard make it possible to overcome the old adage of the schoolmen, *de gustibus non est disputandum* – matters of taste cannot be philosophically disputed (i.e., solved)?

Hume's point of departure is the following assertion: 'It is natural for us to seek a Standard of Taste; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another.'[7] How does Hume proceed to address the problem he poses? The concept of *quality* is mentioned only four times in the relatively short text. Hume states early on that 'beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty'. The next three occurrences of the term are the following: 'this is a quality hereditary in our family', 'a delicate taste of wit or beauty must always be a desirable quality', and 'He not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame'. If we disregard the second quotation, which paraphrases a passage lifted from *Don Quixote*, we are left with three different postulates. The first states that beauty is not an objective quality, and that aesthetic value is integral to individual perception and experience. The second quote simply states that the possession of a discerning taste is a desirable talent, and in the third one, quality designates the particular property that stands out in a specified part of or as a particular aspect of an aesthetic whole.

In the plural, as *qualities*, the term occurs seven times in the short text. Consistently, Hume employs the plural to describe properties of objects, not the subjective judgement. The most well-known example is his use of the anecdote from *Don Quixote* about the two wine tasters who disagree over whether the faint hint in a wine from a special barrel is leather or metal. When the wine had been consumed, a key with a leather fob is found at the

7 Hume 1757, I. XXXIII, section 6.

bottom of the barrel. Neither Hume nor the anecdote focuses on whether the wine was perceived as exceptionally good, but rather on taste as an individual perception of an objective matter.

The semantic differences implied by Hume's use of the singular 'quality' and the plural 'qualities' indicate two different sets of problems. In the singular, 'quality' refers to individual appraisal and the ability to discern the delicacy of the details as well as the harmony of the whole, in other words, what conventionally falls under the purview of the faculty of aesthetic taste. In the plural, 'qualities' refers to the objective properties of the things perceived, that is the classic Aristotelian idea of quality as a characteristic property, like 'soft', 'warm', 'round', etc. There is thus on the one hand the quality of perception and on the other hand the qualities of things.

Having established this distinction, Hume turns to the analogy of physiological taste, and more precisely to the issue of taste deficiencies, such as experienced by sick persons. He asserts that those suffering from a fever or hepatitis cannot be expected to make universally valid judgements, because their diseases distort their perception. The taste judgements of sick persons are thus not only deficient, they are contingent on a special state, and are therefore conditional or automatic. In order to claim validity, an aesthetic assessment must be free.

Having thus dealt with (if not solved) the question of idiosyncratic judgements, Hume returns to more conventional ground by pointing to the reality of an existing canon. The works of Homer and Milton, he stresses, are considered universally valid specimens of good art. However, Hume does not use his acknowledgement of the existence of canonical works to establish a literary gold standard beyond individual experience. On the contrary, Hume somewhat surprisingly concludes that aesthetic judgement is internal, and that quality in the aesthetic sense (in contrast to the sensory) is a question of judgement, in other words 'taste': 'Beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external.' Beauty is a subjective feeling of well-being which does not stem from the objects, but is something we experience in the encounter with an object. The standards are established in or by the public and its consumption of and reflections on art.

On the one hand, Hume investigates the possibility of establishing a standard that can serve as a general benchmark for objects that apparently are incommensurable because they are characterised, even defined, by being unique works of art (and thus in their uniqueness transcending any standard). On the other hand, taste refers to the establishment of collective standards valid for how a given object is experienced even if any collective is made up of different individuals with different preferences and different backgrounds. Rather than solving the issue of the standards of taste, Hume's

decisive contribution consists in how he articulates the problem and provides aesthetic philosophy with a set of distinctions that remain central to the problem of aesthetic appraisal to this day.

Quality as benchmarking

'Quality' plays a relatively modest role in twentieth-century philosophical aesthetics, even in criticism, as other concepts dominated the art discourses. Instead, the concept came to the fore in an area considered art's irreconcilable counterpart, that of commodity production. It became a central technical term in the routines and protocols for ensuring high and uniform quality of industrial products (i.e., *benchmarking*). Concepts such as 'quality assurance' and 'quality management' took the notion of quality in directions previously unexplored. The formula 'quality management' refers neither to substantial nor to accidental qualities, but to the optimisation of resource exploitation, given a particular objective. Quality management is thus essentially 'value for money' independent of whether the objects to be managed are airlines, banks, factories, or public-sector service provision such as that provided by the educational system, the police, or the tax authorities.

The armaments industry was among the first industries to introduce standardisation as an essential principle. The Napoleonic Wars led to mass production of arms, which took weapons production out of the artisan's workshop and into the factory. As the performance of the arms is decisive in battle, the need for standards and quality became a pressing concern. The increased differentiation and complexity in the sphere of production increased the need for standardisation. The many private standardisation organisations that came into being before World War I are an expression of the rationalisation of production that also becomes manifest in the emergence of academic management and business studies.[8] With *Economic Control of Quality of Manufactured Product* from 1931, Walter A. Shewhart, with a background from Bell Labs and early cybernetics, was among the first to articulate protocols of quality control. The American Society for Quality, one of the world's leading quality assurance organisations, revealingly originates from the need to establish standards in the US war effort during World War II. Armand V. Feigenbaum's highly influential *Total Quality Control* (1961) epitomises this tradition and its principles; it has remained a reference book within the field since its publication. Feigenbaum later also coined the concept 'Total Quality Management', today widely known as TQM.

8 In *Fabrikken [The factory]* (Andersen et al. 2004) a presentation is given of the history of standardisation.

In management and business studies, 'quality' implies quantification and standardisation. Quantification is a tool for risk management. From a quality point of view, quantification allows for comparison, thus allowing what in the marketing-liberal jargon of the 1990s was called 'competitive tendering' and 'deregulation'. Quantifiability is an important premise for assessing whether competition is taking place on equal terms, and contributes to reducing individual judgement in assessments. Quantifiability is also a premise for exploiting the dynamics in market mechanisms, *as it makes variable pricing possible*. Given a number of comparable products (with different provenances) that all satisfy a specific standard, production costs may be compared, and the most cost-effective product selected. Such a procedure reveals nothing about the absolute qualities of the objects, only how they satisfy a set of given specifications. Quantification is thus a part of the quality assessment that ideally shortens the way from *is* to *should* and makes it less difficult to choose by removing the individual assessment from the evaluation.

The rise of standardisation was an answer to the increasing complexities of modern industry and to the need to ensure uniform and consistent quality. Two milestones in this history are the establishment of the British Standards Institution (BSI) in 1901 and Deutsches Institut für Normung (DIN) in 1918. Their purpose was to publish and propose national standards. Both were established as non-governmental organisations, NGOs, and thus their proposals did not have the force of law; rather, they are promoted by consensus-creating activities in the relevant sectors of the economy. After World War II this became the fundamental principle of the International Organisation for Standardisation, ISO, a private organisation founded in 1947, and today one of the world's most influential organisations. Through cooperation between several European standardisation organisations, ISO in 1970 started publishing its reports as 'International Standards', and as of today, the organisation has published around 20 000 such standards.[9]

A number of the international standards that today form the basis for the exchange of goods and services originated in ISO. These standards are not limited to the size or design of industrial products, such as the paper format series that includes the familiar A4 sheet (ISO 216), or the different measures of transportation containers (ISO 668), but also include the specifications of electronic file formats such as JPEG (ISO 15444) and MPEG (ISO 21000), classification systems such as ISBN codes (ISO 2108), and communication codes such as RFID (ISO 8000). ISO has even developed a standard glass for wine tasting (ISO 3591), and standards for quality management (ISO 9000)

9 See www.iso.org/iso/home/about.htm (downloaded on 30 November 2015). For a critical assessment of ISO, see Easterling, Keller (2014).

and for the environment (ISO 14000). Thus, in reality, ISO has established the common equivalents which make it possible to realise the principles in the Treaty of Rome (1957) relating to the four freedoms: free flow of persons, goods, services, and capital (the EU is therefore also, together with ILO, NATO, WTO, OECD, and other international stakeholders, represented on ISO's supervisory board). 'Flow' in this case means exchange. The free flow is intended to guarantee that persons, goods, services, and capital may be exchanged (i.e., sold or bought across national borders). However, persons, goods, services, and even capital are locally bound; they have local properties and definitions. For these specific elements to be transferred and sold, standards must be set to make them comparable across national boundaries.

ISO does not restrict itself to establishing only standards to ensure functional quality (i.e., technical requirements and codes). In 1987, ISO published its first set of non-technical standards, the famous ISO 9000, or *Quality Management Standards*, that in the 1990s began a triumphant tour across the world that is still not finished. The ISO 9000 designation is a collective of different types of standards which relate to quality management systems and models to ensure quality in 'design, development, production, installation and service'.[10]

Quality assurance and neo-liberalism

Quality in business or production life is primarily a pragmatic or heuristic concept that refers to how specified objects or processes are determined relative to a set of given standards. Quality assurance is the application of a protocol established for a given standard; this protocol *is in turn* derived from the properties of comparable products or from customer specifications. It is the existence of a standard that permits 'quality' to function as the identification of a difference between comparable objects, and that permits passing judgements like 'better than', 'equal to', or 'poorer than'. However, 'better than' and 'poorer than' do not refer in this case to absolute standards, but have the meaning of 'more or less suitable to a specific purpose'. Thus, quality is *determined by* specific applications and situations, and the extent to which a given object or process is suitable for such applications and situations. Quality thus implies *comparison* (to a standard) and *specificity* (the specific nature of the standard). This distinction is fundamental to the particular paradigm of governance called neo-liberalism.

Obviously, comparison and exchange are in themselves not particularly neo-liberal activities; they are central to any commodity economy and were

10 For an overview, see http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html (downloaded on 30 November 2015).

theorised as such by the founders of modern economics such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. What characterises neo-liberalism may be summarised in three premises: 1) Due to the laws of supply and demand the market is the swiftest and most cost-effective way of allocating the resources needed for society's reproduction. If market principles such as free competition, pricing, etc. were to be extended beyond what is traditionally seen as the commodity market – civil administration, care, cultural sector – one could expect an optimisation of whatever resources were allocated, that is, less waste and a better supply of goods. In short, less money spent and improved quality. By means of the micro economy's tools to mathematically model the relationships between supply and demand, social relations can be calculated, and hence become more or less predictable.[11] 2) The market provides a form for exchanging and distributing goods that optimises competition. Competition increases the rationality of the production; fewer resources are used to produce better commodities, prices go down, sales go up, and everybody wins. In spheres not regulated by the commodity economy, where the objects exchanged do not find their natural value in a market and there is no natural negotiation between supply and demand, other protocols are required to determine values. Service provision and other forms of non-material goods in sectors where there are no market mechanisms (or where these function poorly), such as the quality of the working environment, day care institutions, or retirement homes, therefore require protocols for quantification that mimic those of the market in order to determine the costs and effectiveness of the resource management. 3) The third premise is the notion of 'human capital', coined by economist Gary Becker in the 1960s.[12] Human capital designates the individual's personal resources from the point of view of his or her competitiveness in the labour market. The ability to successfully market oneself in competition with others for the best-paid jobs thus becomes the very token of accumulated human capital. Thus, within the neo-liberal paradigm, quantification is the essential operation in a general logic of quality assurance, crystallised in the fundamental idea of Total Quality Management, that all things can be measured, compared, and evaluated on the basis of the same rationality, that of cost-benefit and supply and demand.

The return of quality in cultural policy

The purpose this historical 'biography' of the quality concept has been to place the present cultural policy 'quality' discourse in a broader perspective.

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11 Levitt and Dubner 2005 is a good and famous example of this.
12 Becker 1962.

Much of the official cultural policy and its ensuing legitimising discourses of the last decade have focused on the quality concept in order to reduce the element of individual judgement in the assessment processes and thus to ensure uniform quality and a 'productive' use of public culture funding. Such a strategy, where public support of art and artistic activities is conceived as an investment, is in accordance with dominant thinking in the protocols of organisations like ISO, and in line with political ambitions for the cultural sector signalled through such terms as *cultural entrepreneurs*, *cultural business network*, and *cultural production*.

The neo-liberal concept of quality was introduced in Norwegian cultural governance with the Report No. 61 to the Storting (1991–1992), 'Kultur i tiden' [Culture in our time], submitted by the then Minister of Culture, Åse Kleveland. The report effectively marks the end of the explicit democratic impulse in cultural policy that informed 'det utvidede kulturbegrepet' [the expanded concept of culture] of the 1970s. The motives were many, heterogeneous, and not necessarily congruent with what is today thought of as neo-liberal practice; among the most prominent was the attempt to deal with the general pluralisation of societal values so much in focus after the dramatic changes in the cultural sector in the 1980s (at the time referred to as the 'post-modern condition'). The combination of factors such as the abolishment of the state broadcasting monopoly, a far more heterogeneous demography (due to increasing immigration), the advent of identity politics (with minority groups claiming their share of the public sphere), and the end of the strong normative role of the classical high culture made the issue of shared aesthetic values more acute. Deregulation was the mantra of the times, and quality appeared as the magical formula – not surprising given the status enjoyed by the idea of Quality Management, which at the time was rapidly gaining popularity in the public sector. An immediate effect of this complex transformation of the public sphere in general and of the cultural sector in particular was comprehensive reforms in Norwegian cultural administration, transferring much of the assessment activity from the artists' organisations to institutional expertise.[13]

There has been little interest in thematising how the substantial changes in cultural policy since the 1990s have left their mark on the terminology used to articulate, understand, and evaluate the aesthetic artefacts and practices themselves, and moreover, how this new conceptual understanding has influenced the art scenes. A concept of 'quality' originating in twentieth-century business studies has become the artistic and aesthetic discussions' gold standard. How this came about can only be understood by bearing in mind that the quality concepts of management theory and aesthetics have the same

13 Bjørkås 2001, p. 45. See also Larsen, Håkon (2012) and Langsted, Jørn, et al. (2005).

origin, and that they draw on a similar, but not identical, semantic logic. The two concepts of quality, that of aesthetics and that of management theory, differ both semantically and pragmatically. Homonymous, they lend themselves to rhetorical exploitation: the word's semantic complexity has turned it into a tool to introduce neo-liberal reforms in the cultural field.

The ambiguity of the concept has been exploited in various ways in the recent political discourse in order to further what this article suggests is fundamentally a neo-liberal agenda.

This chapter has intended to demonstrate how the semantic core of the concept of 'quality' is without any ontological substance. The concept simply designates relational matters, making it easy to adapt the term to different uses. It is thus crucial to differentiate between what is meant by the concept in such widely different arenas as politics, public administration, criticism, universities, academies, and the artistic practices. In each of these contexts, the concept has different functions.

The art field is made up of numerous stakeholders, different agendas, and specific discourses. Different understandings of quality are heard in all these contexts; the concepts of quality in politics, public administration, academies, and the aesthetic discourses of the performing artists are thus divergent. Thus, the fault lines of the quality quarrel do not merely separate private and public, money and art, but also academies and artists, scholars and critics. However, the main pressure is exerted from administrative and political authorities in order to gain acceptance in the art sector for the idea that processes of art should be assessed on the basis of a concept of quality that in the final account is drawn from the world of business studies and production protocols. This development facilitates the nefarious introduction of terms such as 'products', 'marketing', and 'entrepreneurship', that is, a conceptual apparatus compatible with the control model in Feigenbaum's notion of Total Quality Management.

Alternatives to the quality concept?

In twentieth-century Norwegian art criticism, 'quality' was primarily used to characterise craftsman-like skill and mastering of materials, or simply specific properties of the book, the work, or the performance. This particular usage was current in the literary criticism of the newspapers, in public discourse in general, and in the work of committees making decisions in the state's literature purchasing systems.[14] It is well worth noting that quality was long

14 Bale 2001, p. 128.

held to be a secondary although important aspect in the aesthetic assessment of the work. Hence, a given work of art might possess particular qualities, but this was far from stating that it would be deemed to be of overall 'good quality'. What was ultimately of concern was whether a book was of value, or whether a work of art was *successful* (i.e., to what degree the artists successfully realised what was deemed to be the ambition behind the work).

How 'quality' was long held to be a minor concept can be gleaned from a book that was long the mainstay of literary science in Northern Europe: Gero von Wilpert's classic *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*: 'Quality, from (Latin *qualitas* = [Beschaffenheit, that is] texture, nature, consistency), in contrast to measurable *quantity*' [my emphasis].' That is all. However, the small and compact reference work has six columns of 'Literarisches Wertschätzung', that is, 'literary appraisal', or more literally, 'assessment of literary value'. Neither the first nor the second edition of the Norwegian counterpart, *Litteraturvitenskapelig leksikon* [Encyclopaedia of literary science], has any separate headings for 'quality', even if the term is applied sporadically under other headings.[15]

Unlike 'aesthetic value', the concept of 'artistic quality' suggests intentionality, and hence that knowledge of the intentions that spawned the work becomes an implicit requirement for its assessment. Aesthetic value, on the other hand, is the result of a process of appraisal that does not necessarily take into account the question of intentionality (for instance when a landscape is said to be beautiful). The conflation of aesthetic value with artistic quality may thus lead to the confusion of two essentially different types of judgements: the appraisal of the craftsman's skills (something is properly made and realised according to plan) and the evaluation of a subjective experience (something makes an impression or generates pleasure) – a distinction that echoes Hume's differentiation between the qualities (in the plural) of the object and the quality (in the singular) of the aesthetic experience. An unfortunate consequence of such confusion is that identifying recognisable craftsmanship – good portrayals, tightly composed, etc. – has become concurrent with the judgement that a book, as such, is of high *quality* (i.e., is successful art). Thus, a notable feature of the prevailing quality discourse is the collapse of the distinction between the *neutral* meaning of the term, where 'quality' is the sum of the measurable properties of an object, a system, or a process, and the term's *valorised* meaning, where quality is the valued properties of an object, a system, or a process (beauty, elegance, relevance, etc.).

Whether quality is to be understood as the measurable properties of a given object with regard to aspects such as symmetry, lifelikeness, clarity,

15 Lothe et al. 2007. Bjerck Hagen (2004) was then a relatively unique figure in Norway for his interest in quality in literary research.

etc., or as a judgement passed by the faculty of taste deeming an aesthetic object to be pleasurable, delicate, genuine, etc., in order to function, the concept must always relate to a standard, whether the standard is of a tangible nature, that is, refers to physical properties, or is intangible, that is, refers to a set of values. This principle applies regardless of whether it refers to so-called objective or subjective qualities, that is, measurable or non-measurable qualities. However, as the term's semantics have been increasingly marked by the semantics of business studies, another dimension has been added to the concept, namely expectations about future performance and hence also the expectation of future returns on the investment.

The concept is thus always a function of a standard, that is, any quality assessment is contingent upon a hierarchical system that precedes it. It follows from this that 'quality' is not suited to characterise works of art that break with established conventions and preconceptions. Nevertheless, it may be this aspect of art, its transcendence of our expectations, which causes us to perceive certain works and practices as *outstanding* and relevant – something that distinguishes itself, draws attention to the *way* it is, by being *different* in a way that we previously had not experienced. Only in this way can aesthetic value also become something else and more than the projection and confirmation of earlier experiences, that is, *art*.

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Literary quality: Historical perspectives

Erik Bjerck Hagen, Christine Hamm, Frode Helmich Pedersen, Jørgen Magnus Sejersted and Eirik Vassenden

Introduction

The phenomenon *literary quality* is a fundamental part of any living literary culture. Nevertheless, it has proven difficult to pin down and define, a difficulty that has only increased over the years. In the eighteenth century things were easier. There was greater certainty that the contemporary elite culture was the most enlightened the world had ever seen, it was less problematic to think of values in universal terms, and it was still possible to operate with classical ideals of beauty as they were found in various stable genres. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, a stronger sense of subjectivity made its way into taste and judgement, and the subjective conditions for calling something good and something else less good began to be examined. This shift notwithstanding, prominent thinkers, such as David Hume in Scotland and Immanuel Kant in Germany, continued to believe that the subjective enjoyment of aesthetic quality could be relatively easily universalised. If only the individual critic or *connoisseur* would purge his personal interests and private passions, he could arrive at a dispassionate judgement that one legitimately might claim was universally valid.

Since Romanticism, Western culture has, however, become even more subjectified and much more historicised, and its hegemony as the universal carrier of culture has been strongly challenged. In his classic essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' (1757), Hume writes that 'the same Homer who pleased people at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago is still admired today in Paris and in London'. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have retained all their power, he states, despite 'all the changes of climate, government, religion, and language …'[16]

16 Hume 1993, p. 139.

Yet the question remains whether this Homer is identical to himself or if 'he' is many. Did he please Hume as he did readers and listeners in antiquity? Does he please us in the same way now?

The answers to these questions point in many directions. On the one hand, there exists a Western literary canon and we still have a fairly strong notion of what literary quality looks and feels like. The most frequently applied criteria in literary discussions have not increased dramatically in number from the Romantic period to the present, and if one is forced to defend a literary judgement, it is generally done in very recognisable ways. On the other hand, we should not underestimate the resistance to the literary canon and to the ideas of literary quality in general. Deciding what is estimable is always a question of power: a literary judgement may appear innocent and universal enough on the surface, but underneath one may find the ideological preferences of those who have the power to define and uphold a given culture.

However, it must be added that a strong interest in defining literary quality may go hand in hand with an awareness of the possible biases and contingencies involved in the definitions. Ideas about quality that are not constantly under attack and critically examined will soon become rigid and turn authors and works into distant monuments. A self-critical and self-revising attitude is a crucial part of the hegemonic philosophical tradition from Socrates to this day. As with Shakespeare's Iago, this tradition is 'nothing, if not critical'.[17] Also, ways of thinking that seek to break down prevalent notions of quality will, as a rule, still retain *some* ideas of quality. It is usually assumed that something new and better will arise out of the ashes of the old. The term *literature* frequently is given an inherently normative aspect: a literary text is a *good* text.

This article is structured as follows: We commence with some assessments of Ernest Hemingway's first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (Section II). Next we outline how the discourse on literary quality has been conducted from around 1750 to the present (III–V). Then follow three sections (VI–VIII) that problematise the discourse on quality according to three principal concepts: *history*, *ideology* and *gender*. We conclude with some commentary on Hemingway's novel (IX).

On Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

Ernest Hemingway's first novel ends with the following lines:

> Down-stairs we came out through the first-floor dining-room to the street. A waiter went for a taxi. It was hot and bright. Up the street was a little square

17 *Othello* II, 1, 125.

> with trees and grass where there were taxis parked. A taxi came up the street, the waiter hanging out at the side. I tipped him and told the driver where to drive, and got in beside Brett. The driver started up the street. I settled back. Brett moved close to me. We sat close against each other. I put my arm around her and she rested against me comfortably. It was very hot and bright, and the houses looked sharply white. We turned out onto the Gran Via.
>
> 'Oh, Jake,' Brett said, 'we could have had such a damned good time together.' Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me. 'Yes,' I said. 'Isn't it pretty to think so?'[18]

Even those who have not read the novel will probably recognise this extract as good, as literature. If we ask what *makes* it good, the reader might first point to a mood, a melancholy, something unspoken. The protagonists in the novel have had their opportunities, but now they appear to see their own limitations, and the reader wants to know more: Who are these people? Why have they landed in precisely such a situation? How representative are they? What can we learn from them? What do they really mean in their final lines? How can we manage to know them better? In other words, everything that makes us read on or – in this case – reread the novel.

On further reading, the sense of quality may increase, decrease or remain more or less the same – or it may prove to be uneven and perhaps change from one chapter to the next. Perhaps we may come to like some of the characters better than others, and in this too it is possible to discern differences in quality: the more we like a character, the more we tend to appreciate the text he or she is a part of.

Now if the reader is further pressed into providing a *rationale* for an articulated and positive literary judgement, she might say: 'It's alive', 'It's different', 'It's genuine' – and would then already have revealed much about how we in the last two or three centuries have decided that a text possesses quality.[19] If the reader is a literary critic, she would also need to describe in more detail *what* it is about the text that gives it this effect. In 1987, for example, the critic Harold Bloom focused on Hemingway's special use of *parataxis* (i.e., a placing of all the clauses or phrases after one another with no connectives). They appear to be detached from one another and are of equal value. None are independent or subordinate, and none appear to be more important than the others. The parataxis in itself does not create quality, but in Hemingway it has a special effect. Bearing this in mind, Bloom mentions 'an even tonality of

18 Hemingway 1976, p. 206.
19 See Hagen 2004, pp. 44–50.

apparent understatement', thus reminding the reader of Hemingway's well-known iceberg technique – nine tenths of the content should remain under the surface.[20] Some of its first readers experienced the novel as amoral, cynical and empty of content, but many critics immediately noticed Hemingway's special stylistic qualities. The poet Conrad Aiken mentioned 'the unattractiveness, not to say the sordidness of the scene, and the (on the whole) gracelessness of the people', but also the author's 'extraordinary individuality of style' and the novel's 'quite extraordinary effect of honesty and reality'.[21] In 1924, the critic Edmund Wilson had seen how Hemingway 'is remarkably successful in suggesting moral values by a series of simple statements'.[22] All the characters in the book always have intense emotions about each other, and Hemingway highlights this intensity by rarely mentioning the emotions. They are merely suggested, implied or embedded in the actions and gestures of the characters.

After pointing out the elements of parataxis in Hemingway's style, Harold Bloom is in a position to place Hemingway's qualities in a larger literary-criticism context:

> Hemingway possessed both a great style and an important sensibility. He was not an original moralist, a major speculative intellect, a master of narrative, or superbly gifted in the representation of persons. That is to say, he was not Tolstoy, whom he hoped to defeat, he said, if only he could live long enough. But style and sensibility can be more than enough, as *The Sun Also Rises* demonstrates. Style alone will not do it; consider Updike or Cheever. We go back to *The Sun Also Rises* to learn a sensibility and to modify our own in the process of learning.[23]

This is a fairly loosely outlined map, but Bloom's six criteria remain in use, and no matter what your literary beliefs may be, you must work hard to write something credible if you lack something close to 'a great style' and 'an important sensibility'.

But how stable is this judgement of Hemingway and his style? How credible do Bloom's comments about *The Sun Also Rises* appear if we regard literary quality from standpoints prevalent in the middle of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries? To what degree do we see changes in the relationship between what Bloom calls style, sensibility, morality, power of thought and narrative ability? How important is it to be 'particularly good at

20 Bloom 2007, p. 332.
21 Meyers 1982, p. 90.
22 Meyers 1982, p. 64.
23 Bloom 2007, pp. 333–334.

portraying characters' as if they were alive just like us? To what extent is the *aesthetic* – style, sensibility – something that can be disconnected from the demands of moral and cognitive insight?

A critic from the Enlightenment: Samuel Johnson

The oldest and most durable of Harold Bloom's criteria is 'the ability to represent people'. In his book *The Western Canon* he writes that '[t]he peculiar magnificence of Shakespeare is in his power of representation of human character and personality and their mutabilities'.[24] Here he follows Samuel Johnson, who in his famous preface to a 1765 Shakespearean edition declared: 'Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature.'[25] Both Johnson and Bloom believe that Shakespeare has no equals when it comes to the ability to create characters who appear to have been taken straight out of real life and nature. *Mimesis*, or representation, had been a major characteristic of fiction since Aristotle, but literature's newly enhanced powers to depict reality had for Johnson become the main source of literary quality or *pleasure*, and pleasure he elsewhere calls 'the end of poetry'.[26]

Mimesis also implies a strong cognitive element in the assessment of quality: 'The end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing', Johnson writes, and he finds an ocean of 'practical axioms and domestic wisdom' in Shakespeare's plays.[27] Such a link between aesthetic quality and practical, useful wisdom may sound too moralistic to the modern ear, but Johnson integrates morality into the aesthetic effect; it is not something controlling this effect from the outside. Nor does Johnson underplay the role of imaginative ability in literature. Admittedly, he lashes out against readers who were led astray by their imagination to seek 'delirious ecstasies' through literature instead of seeing literature as 'the mirror of life', but in a later essay on Milton, his list of criteria includes both 'power of invention' and 'vigour of sentiment'.[28] He now praises some of Milton's early poems for having 'a cast original and unborrowed', and we are told that '[p]oetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason'.[29]

For Johnson, Milton stands solidly on the bedrock of morality and Christianity – the main theme in *Paradise Lost* is after all to justify 'the ways

24 Bloom 1994, p. 63.
25 Johnson 1989, p. 122.
26 Johnson 2000, p. 706.
27 Johnson 1989, p. 126.
28 Johnson 1989, p. 125.
29 Johnson 2000, p. 698 and p. 703.

of God to men' – yet he says that Milton is virtually unique in this respect: '[T]he moral of other poems is incidental and consequent; in Milton's only it is essential and intrinsic.'[30] On the opposite end of this scale, Johnson places his hero Shakespeare, whose main fault is that he 'is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose'.[31] This sounds like a serious enough accusation. After all, in an article from 1750, Johnson had declared that the requirements of the new time for a more 'realistic' literature also impose much stricter demands for moral instruction: 'It is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature which are most proper for imitation.'[32] Here he also warns against portraying charismatic villains, whom we are easily charmed by, even though they have been 'the great corrupters of the world'. This Platonic view of the seductive abilities of fiction did not, however, prevent Johnson from also enjoying Shakespeare's less edifying characters, as in the appreciation of Shakespeare's greatest clown, Falstaff: 'But Falstaff unimitated, unimitable Falstaff, how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice; of sense which may be admired but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised, but hardly detested.'[33]

Johnson is also the critical hero of the modern Romantic critic Harold Bloom, and Bloom finds few problems in placing his predecessor outside the more restrained and neoclassical context of the eighteenth century: 'On Milton, on Shakespeare, on Pope, Johnson is everything a wise critic should be: he directly confronts greatness with a total response, to which he brings his complete self.'[34] Since Johnson has also been portrayed in the most famous of all English biographies – James Boswell's *The Life of Johnson* – we know more about this eccentric self than about most other critics, and Bloom feels that Johnson is stronger than all other critics 'not only in cognitive power, learning, and wisdom, but in the splendor of his literary personality'.[35]

The adulation of personality in Western culture arrived in earnest with Romanticism and its much-discussed expressive turn. The supreme poet was now furnished with new depths and a new mystique – and imagination gained freer rein to express itself. Style and sensibility came to the fore, and originality and authenticity became more important than the balanced weighting Johnson undertook between moral responsibility, wisdom, inventiveness, and pleasure.

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30 Johnson 2000, p. 703.
31 Johnson 1989, p. 130.
32 Johnson 2000, p. 177.
33 Johnson 1989, p. 205.
34 Bloom 1994, p. 185.
35 Bloom 1994, p. 192.

Romanticism: The expressive turn

An important reason for the prominent role of morality in eighteenth-century poetics was the lack of a generally accepted distinction between fiction and nonfiction. Without such a distinction, there could be no 'free zone' of fiction, where the claims of morality are wholly or partly suspended. It was, however, also around this time – in the middle of the eighteenth century – that the foundation for such a distinction was established, through the birth of *aesthetics* as a separate field of philosophical inquiry. Aesthetics originates with Alexander Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750), which was concerned with the systematic inquiry into *sensory* (as opposed to rational) knowledge. Baumgarten's work thus dealt with sensory (or sensuous) knowledge in general, with no particular emphasis on art. The term, however, gradually became inextricably tied to art, which was by many seen as the most prominent vessel for such knowledge. The philosophical discourse of aesthetics thus moved away from an inquiry into the general properties of sensory knowledge towards the question of what characterises *beauty*.

One of the most important works in this tradition is Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgement*) from 1790. In this work Kant famously defined beauty as a special kind of mental pleasure, characterised by a disinterested attitude and the experience of an unpurposeful 'free play' between the mind's faculties, with the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as the prime mover. Through this definition of beauty, Kant established the cornerstone of what later came to be known as *aesthetic autonomy,* where art is viewed as fundamentally dissociated from the didactic, societal and moral demands that had been central throughout the Enlightenment period.

The early German Romantics writing at the end of the eighteenth century – Ludwig Tieck, Novalis and the Schlegel brothers – were (despite their reservations about many aspects of his philosophy) enthusiastic about Kant's strong emphasis on *freedom*, which became central to their own way of thinking about the nature of poetry. The principal tenet in early Romantic poetics is the idea of *free poetic creation*, which arises out of the imaginative mind of a unique individual. This idea has profound consequences also with regard to the notion of literary quality. The main task of poetry was now no longer to be an accurate representation of reality, but to be a unique expression of the creative poet. Poetry, or literary fiction, in other words became primarily thought of as *expressive* rather than mimetic. Poetic freedom for the early Romantics also signalled something *eternal*, which was grounded in the ability of poetry to suggest spheres beyond the reach of reason. Some Romantics saw the free imagination of the poet as an inexhaustible source of poetic creations, and they considered the great works of art inexhaustible in themselves, in the sense that they would always be able to yield new meanings and render new reader experiences.

Consequently, the Romantic literary work *should not* be artificial, rhetorical, mechanical or affected, but rather natural, harmonious, organic and authentic. These were the keywords designating Romanticism's idea of literary quality. The task of literary fiction was no longer to demonstrate or illustrate moral doctrines – not because the immoral was adulated or because moral issues were considered alien to poetry, but because authors in the Romantic period considered it self-evident that unique expressions from a creative imagination could never be other than morally edifying. In a sense, then, the Romantics did not assume the full consequence of Kant's liberation of the aesthetic sphere: poetry was still considered both morally edifying and a source of knowledge. But this moral aspect of art and poetry was now embedded in a new mode of thinking, thereby gaining a different meaning than in Enlightenment thought: poetry was – if successful – *automatically* morally edifying because it strengthened and enriched the reader's ability to feel, imagine and think.

One should also note that – even if it was put somewhat in the background in the poetological writings of the time – the mimetic aspect of literary fiction was not seriously challenged during the Romantic period. Romantic poetry presents us, by and large, with characters and settings that are recognisable from our real-world experiences. T.S. Eliot writes of William Wordsworth that 'in the matter of mimesis he is more deeply Aristotelian than some who have aimed at following Aristotle more closely'.[36] Eliot's observation is in line with Wordsworth's expressed ambition of bringing literature closer to life as it was actually lived and felt, in a language similar to what is heard among ordinary people. For him, the highest poetry was neither a demonstration of rhetorical brilliance nor a matter of soaring into fantastic worlds, but rather a tribute to 'the simple produce of the common day'.[37]

Realism and modernism

While many of Romanticism's criteria for literary quality persisted throughout the nineteenth century and are still with us today, Romantic poetics were met with resistance from the Realist movement, which gained ground around 1850. At the core of Realism's critique of Romantic poetics is the relationship between literature and reality. Although the original aim of many Romantic poets was to create a literature that felt closer to the actual experiences of real people than what had been the common approach during the Classicist

36 Eliot 1961, p. 65.

37 This statement is from the poem 'Home at Grasmere', published as part of the long poem *The Excursion* (1814).

period, the Romantic emphasis on imagination, the visionary and the transcendental was, by the mid-nineteenth century, viewed as exalted, dreamy and escapist and thus as ultimately detached from reality. Realist literature, in comparison, more strongly emphasised *mimesis* as a benchmark for literary quality. The Realists were generally more concerned with truth than beauty, but retained the Romantic criteria of *originality* and *authenticity*.

The Realists' call for a literature that sought to accurately represent contemporary reality meant that literary fiction could no longer shy away from the horrors of poverty, oppression and injustice. An honest representation of societal problems and human suffering conflicted with the idealist notion of beauty and meant that fiction would have to become *engaged*; it had to be politically aware. In the Nordic context, Georg Brandes was the strongest advocate of this view of literature. In a famous formulation, he demanded that literature 'put problems under debate', which presupposed the author's clear understanding of 'our present time and reality'. According to Brandes, literature should reflect reality, deal with concrete issues and ideas that concern us here and now, and moreover actively intervene in contemporary cultural and political conflicts.

However, criteria do not develop linearly, and the Realists did not gain an enduring victory over the idealistic view of fiction as an *autonomous* sphere, fundamentally dissociated from the reality of life. The idea of art's autonomy returns with renewed force in literary modernism, where it is argued and promoted with great conviction in many theoretical varieties throughout the twentieth century – not least within academic literary studies. The idea of autonomy now appears together with other modernist criteria for literary quality, such as *complexity*, *irony* and *negativity*, which, taken together, amount to a marked break with nineteenth-century realism. In the Modernist view, the Realists' notion of the literary work as an accurate representation of reality was misguided and theoretically naïve. To the Modernists, the *break with tradition* was indeed a quality in itself, as expressed in Ezra Pound's famous slogan 'make it new'. The modernist disdain for traditional views and forms also entailed further literary criteria, such as the emphasis on formal experiment and vigorous attacks on time-honoured values. Modernist authors generally objected to the idea of fiction as a sophisticated source of pleasure and knowledge for the cultural elites. This point of view was expressed within literary scholarship as well. In his influential work *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1925), I.A. Richards attacked both the traditional emphasis on literary pleasure and all forms of message hunting. Instead, the internal tensions of the literary text itself were established as the ultimate sign of literary quality.

But the view of what makes literature valuable is never static, and conflicting criteria of literary quality co-existed throughout the twentieth century. When F.R. Leavis, for example, summarises his view on literary quality

by employing the concepts *reality* and *sincerity* – and thereby signals an adherence to the traditional criteria of *mimesis* and authenticity – he runs counter to the notion of aesthetic autonomy which was prevalent in modernist poetics. And when he goes on to proclaim Jane Austen the great pioneer of the English novel, it is primarily because her novels have an inescapable *moral* dimension.[38] In a German language context, Hermann Broch may be offered as another example of a prominent modernist figure who deviates from mainstream modernist poetics: while he is often seen as an arch-modernist because of his antibourgeois attitude and daring formal experiments, he was, throughout his work, unequivocal in his stance that the ultimate *raison d'être* of all artistic creation is of a moral rather than a purely aesthetic nature. He considered the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* asocial and argued that the task of literary fiction was to provide ethical guidance to crisis-ridden humanity.[39]

Despite the historical changes and disagreements concerning the nature of literary quality, it is quite possible to consider the whole development that we have traced in the previous pages as one large and mutable tradition. Viewed as a whole, this tradition is just as much characterised by continuity and accumulation as by irreversible breaks and ruptures. Literary tradition has its persistent internal tensions, such as the ones between form and content, aesthetics and morality, and the autonomous versus the socially engaged work of art. But these tensions need not be viewed as factors which make the notion of a continuous tradition untenable, but rather may be seen as vital to keeping the tradition alive. In our own time, very few would regard the Western literary canon as given once and for all. It has its authority, but the debate over individual works and individual authors continues to create movement and change. Nor do the criteria discussed in this article have fixed meanings and significance, but may shift or transform when they are applied to new forms of literature.[40]

That being said, one should also note that far from all literary researchers today would accept the prominent role of critical evaluation that we have taken for granted. In twentieth-century literary criticism it was customary to assert that evaluative criticism was far too subjective to be regarded as part of the *scientific* study of literature. The question of quality was commonly subordinated to detailed description, formal analysis and textual interpretation. Another commonplace was to claim that aesthetic quality is a bourgeois or hedonistic notion, and that the quest for quality would threaten to neu-

38 Leavis 1948, p. 10 and p. 16.
39 Hinderer 2014, p. 22.
40 See Hagen 2004 and Ellefsen 2016 for discussions of the limited range of criteria in individual literary judgements.

tralise literature's potential for social criticism. The idea in this line of thinking is that all judgements about literary quality should be viewed as relative to a historical epoch, a political ideology or the race, gender and class of the person doing the judging. The subjective or contingent aspects of evaluative criticism would thus be revealed and we would see that the literary canon could have consisted of quite different works and writers. Even Homer and Shakespeare may appear flawed if the needs of the interpreters are regarded as more important than the supposed merits of the literary work itself.

We will now examine this issue in more detail by discussing the notion of literary quality in connection with the concepts *history*, *ideology* and *gender*. How do historicists, ideology critics and feminists deal with the concept of literary quality?

Historicism as a problem

The concept of *historicism* has nuances of meaning, but usually refers to the idea that all cultural products are connected to the time and place of their birth. If this idea is followed to its logical conclusion, one might assume that a realistic work can be good only for realist readers, and that it necessarily will be a problem for a realist and, say, a modernist to agree on a common quality experience. How much does a person from the 1950s have in common with a person from the 1850s? Do they not live in different realities, also in terms of literature? Does not history itself lay down boundaries for meaningful dialogue?

A true historicist may relinquish all ideas of common experiences and dialogue, or at least find it more important to explain why a literary work was seen as good at a certain time than to empathise with the elements of the work that speak to several eras or all eras. Even so, it should be quite possible to recognise the power of history to change taste and judgement and still maintain an interest in what connects us across time. Is it not possible to combine historical experience with a strong sense that some literary works are better than others?

We have, to a certain degree, already taken a stance on this issue by establishing a continuity in quality judgements since the time of Johnson and Hume. Needless to say, it could be argued that we could have more sharply distinguished between the various paradigms – Enlightenment, Romanticism, Realism, Modernism – but such marked delineations do not appear to correspond to the actual overlapping and the great historical diversity within each epoch. If the different epochs had more forcefully disciplined their artists, the differences between the epochs might have spoken more clearly to our sense of contrast, but those differences might also have alienated us much more from the past. This brings us to the most basic questions of literary

interpretation: What constitutes literary value and literary meaning in the first place? What are the function and role of reading itself when value is promoted and meaning determined?

If one has a modern, reader-oriented view on these questions – as formulated in philosophical hermeneutics, in parts of reception theory, in American pragmatism, etc. – one assumes that the reader's horizon and interests are always actively involved in the assessment of value. In this way, the literary works are always renewed because they are constantly answering new and relevant questions. In the reading process itself there always takes place at least the beginning of what Hans-Georg Gadamer called 'the fusion of horizons'. Before actual interpretation can start, the reader and the text are already involved in a shared enterprise, in belonging to the meaning and values that will be spelled out. Thus historical distance is at least partly already overcome.

However, this fluid situation does not prevent us from reading each in our own way or from constantly changing our opinions according to our own state of mind at any given time. If quality is something that is constituted when the reader encounters the text, it would appear that both the text and the reader are subjected to a powerful law of change. In an influential book, appropriately named *Contingencies of Value* (1988), Barbara Herrnstein Smith writes about how she has never been able to maintain a stable assessment of Shakespeare's sonnets, even though the sonnets are one of the things she knows best:

> Some of the sonnets that are now (i.e., this week or the day before yesterday) my favorites, I once (i.e., last week or ten years ago) thought of as obscure, grotesque, or raw; and some that I once saw as transparent, superficial, or perfunctory have subsequently become, for me, thick with meaning, subtle, and profound.[41]

Here historicism is not only taken to be completely subjective, but is also unpredictably fragmented. The person I am *now* is not the one I was yesterday! What I love this week may be boring next week!

In response, it could be argued that Herrnstein Smith is at least working with the canonised Shakespeare, and that she has apparently never doubted *him*, but this fact does not fully solve the problem. To come closer to a solution, we would have to examine a series of actual reception histories and investigate how different readers at different times give their rationale for liking one thing better than another. If other Shakespeare critics have the same experience as Herrnstein Smith does, her case will be strengthened; if

41 Herrnstein Smith 1988, p. 6.

the pattern is different, doubt must be raised about the strength or sincerity of her position.[42]

Hippolyte Taine, one of the founders of historicism, believed that he could indeed formulate a more secure ground for quality judgements. In a small collection of lectures entitled 'The Ideal in Art' (1874), he envisions that the good critic should be able to 'point out progress or decline, to recognise periods of bloom and decay, not arbitrarily, but according to a universal law'.[43] Briefly put, this universal law refers to the idea that a human being's *essential quality* should be as prominent as possible in a given work. The definition of the essential quality is derived from a natural science approach. In the same way as in biology, where a distinction is made between external non-essential variations and the deep features of the species, Taine believes that art products may be studied according to 1) changing fashions, 2) the spirit of the time (periodisation), 3) special characters of people ('the national character'), 4) the race itself, 'the obscure and gigantic strata which linguistic science is beginning to lay bare', and 5) the universal traits of man, 'which lead him to found societies, religions, sciences and arts'. Taine does not hesitate to rank these traits:

> To this scale of spiritual values corresponds, step by step, the scale of literary values. All other things being equal, a book is made more or less valuable as the essential quality it puts forth is more or less important, that is, more or less elementary and stable […].

The hierarchy of literary works drawn by Taine does not present any surprises. The peaks are the Hebrew psalms of the Bible, Homer, Shakespeare, and Goethe: 'Works of this class survive the century and the people to whom they owe their origin. They pass beyond the ordinary limits of time and space; they are understood wherever we find a thinking mind.'[44]

A smug assessment approach such as this was doomed for a downfall, and quite quickly the best-known Taine student in Scandinavia, Georg Brandes, countered his master:

> When Taine sets up a complete and accurate scientific theory about the free art of criticism, it constitutes a grave contradiction, and it becomes doubly so, when one personally is the first to ridicule all those who would set rules for the performance of the arts.[45]

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42 See Hagen 2004, pp. 51–79 for a discussion of Nathaniel Hawthorne's reception history, and Hagen 2015 for an analysis of continuity and discontinuity in the reception of Ibsen.
43 Taine 1874, p. 20. (p. 28 of the English edition).
44 Taine 1874, p. 65.
45 Brandes 1870, p. 155.

No other person in the Nordic countries has tied literature to its social context as Brandes has, but for him criticism cannot be a science. Rather, it is itself an art, and the critic may apply any and all means to approach his unique object:

> To designate the *Oehlenschlägerian* fantasy, to characterize the style of Correggio in contrast to Raphael we have in a strict sense no other word or term than that the one is *Oehlenschlägerian*, the other *Correggioian*. Here is the line where scientific aesthetics crosses into the *Art* of criticism. Here no predetermined procedure applies, here any and all means are good. One must break into one's subject, on whichever side it offers an opening, form one's examination, one's procedure, even one's style in accordance with the object, call on one's eyesight for assistance where concepts are inadequate, speak to one's reader's fantasy, to his recollections, to his senses, in short, use any plan of attack which can make the critic the master of his object.[46]

The creative critic is free to emphasise what he wishes. There are no boundaries, whether one is a historicist or not. Together Taine and Brandes can illustrate four important points: 1) Historicists are actually interested in quality and assessment, not only in facts and explanation. 2) Historicists do not themselves see any great conflict between explaining a work according to its context and assessing the same work through effects transgressing the same context. 3) Quality cannot be defined outside or independent of the critic's personal judgement and taste. 4) It is not a given that judgement and taste are as fragmented and changeable as Herrnstein Smith suggests: Brandes is still one of the first we turn to if we really want to test whether our judgement of, say, a play by Ibsen is tenable.

Quality and ideology

The idea of a manageable concept of quality is further challenged when we include the concept of *ideology*. An ideology-oriented reading asks first and foremost for the underlying *interests* hidden behind the assessments: 'Good or poor for whom?' What is good for the aristocrat is not necessarily good for the worker; what is good for an older white man is not necessarily good for a younger black woman. Literary quality may thus be understood as thoroughly subordinated to the political and social conditions that give rise to the evaluations.

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46 Brandes 1870, p. 155.

An ideological way of reading is a function-oriented methodology focused on what the work of art is able to *accomplish*. In a narrow sense, we are then talking of art or literature as being in the service of ideology, and in a wider sense about art or literature as being structured in accordance with certain conceptual trends. The former position comes into conflict with the idea of the freedom of art and is definitely in conflict with a definition of art as 'what has purposiveness without purpose' (as Kant puts it in *Critique of Judgement*).[47] Art is and should be something more than propaganda. The second position is, on the other hand, commonly recognisable. It implies that we see art as the carrier or administrator of values and value systems. But then again: Which value systems, and which values?

The most elementary definition of ideology comes from Marx's *Das Kapital*: 'Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es.'[48] – '*They do not know it, but they are doing it*.' Accordingly, ideology is the unacknowledged value or attitude underpinning and determining our actions, in other words what we, in Marx's words, call *false consciousness*. The idea in revolutionary Marxism is to tear down this existential wall, or to remove the veil that prevents us from achieving an authentic experience of the world, thereby setting us free. A Marxist analysis will reveal such hidden and unacknowledged value systems wherever they might exist.

By questioning the relationship between cultural valuation and ideological interests, we are pursuing a distinction between *quality* and *relevance* in literature. Is a good book necessarily important? Is an important book necessarily good? To what extent is it at all useful, not to say possible, to distinguish these two 'qualities' from each other? As an example, we will here pause to consider a work of literature where the question of ideology has dominated its reception as well as the judgement of its literary quality, that is, *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, who in 1993 became the first (and up to now the only) African-American recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature. An important question in the reception of her books has been how they should be read: Are the traditional criteria and analytical procedures relevant in the encounter with the types of experiences the book describes and builds on, that is to say, African-American history, racism and minority experiences? Should other criteria be established? And how should we deal with the fact that most conceivable ways of articulating these experiences not only are inadequate, but also are part of – and hence to some extent controlled by – a traditional cultural hegemony? This last question then points to an important problem both in post-colonial literature and in feminist literature: the

47 Kant 1995, § 10–17.
48 Marx 1968, p. 88.

dilemma that arises when the oppressed party must articulate his/her experiences of oppression in the language of the oppressor (which in many cases is also the language of the oppressed).

A crucial question in the critical reception of Morrison's novel is whether it should even be discussed within the framework of what is 'good', or whether doing so would imply some sort of cultural 'abuse' of the work, of the author, and of African-American culture. Some years before its publication, Morrison herself pointed out that the comparative basis used by literary critics is itself anchored in a set of values remote from the culture from which the work emerges: 'Most criticism […] justifies itself by identifying black writers with some already accepted white writer […]. I find such criticism dishonest because it never goes into the work on its own terms.'[49]

Morrison was subject to precisely this type of labelling when in 1990 Harold Bloom characterised her novels as 'possible candidates for entering an American canon founded upon what I insist would be aesthetic criteria alone'.[50] Bloom distinguishes between ideology and aesthetics, and acknowledges the aesthetic aspects of Morrison's work, but goes a long way to separate the ideology and the political relevance from the novel's aesthetic value: 'Toni Morrison, in her time and place, answering to the travail of her people, speaks to the needs of an era, but her art comes out of a literary tradition not altogether at one with her cultural politics.'[51] The tradition Bloom refers to is thus the great modernist novel tradition, where Morrison has been placed, both before and after Bloom and the Nobel Prize.

The question of quality in the sense of canon was a major concern when the novel was published in 1987. Interestingly, we see here some striking differences between literary cultures: while both the American and British receptions comprised in part strongly divergent assessments of many types, the Norwegian reception was united in its praise and was based on a notion of timeless, canonical quality.[52] '*Beloved* is not first and foremost a book about the African-American people, but about human beings,' said *Fædrelandsvennen*.[53] In *Klassekampen* the judgement is unambiguously canonising: '"Beloved" has the stamp of the classic on each page, the master's fingerprint all over. […] "Beloved" is definitely knocking on the door of the Nobel Prize.'[54]

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49 Morrison in Tate 1984, p. 122.
50 Bloom 1990, p. 1.
51 Bloom 1990, p. 5.
52 Tulluan 2000, p. 62.
53 Abrahamsen 1988.
54 Olsen 1988.

This tendency differs significantly from the highly differentiated and heated discussion in American criticism, where everything was put under the microscope, from Morrison's use of biographical material, attempts to set the record straight in terms of the conflict-filled African-American history (including previous discussions about this history, such as the controversies surrounding Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), to the question of whether *Beloved* is a literary masterpiece in the canonical sense or – as some critics suggested – a melodramatic piece of ideology. A central part of the book's narrative borrows extensively from the history of slavery in America: in the 1850s Margaret Garner was arrested and indicted in Ohio for having killed one of her own children while she and her husband were escaping slave hunters. This – a mother killing her own children as an act of mercy – is also very much a traditional literary motif, often called the Medea motif, after Euripides' depiction of the tragedy of *Medea*. Thus, the novel has both a political and a literary context.

The fact that Morrison does have a consistent set of values and a historical-political (or activist) agenda was highlighted by several critics, and often considered a positive feature. Ashraf Rushdy calls attention to how the use of historical and biographical material is not only justified by the novel, but also renders the power structures of the past more concrete and real: 'By taking a historical personage – a daughter of a faintly famous African-American victim of racist ideology – and constructing her as a hopeful presence in a contemporary setting, Morrison offers an introjection into the field of revisionist historiography and fiction.'[55]

Others chose a completely different approach. In *The New York Times Book Review* Margaret Atwood opens her review thus:

> 'BELOVED' is Toni Morrison's fifth novel, and another triumph. Indeed, Ms. Morrison's versatility and technical and emotional range appear to know no bounds. If there were any doubts about her stature as a pre-eminent American novelist, of her own or any other generation, 'Beloved' will put them to rest. In three words or less, it's a hair-raiser.[56]

Atwood also characterises Morrison's use of supernatural elements as written 'with magnificent practicality' (i.e., as a fully integrated part of the novel's realism). Measured against such criteria as 'reality' or 'sincerity', the novel is successful, because the author has succeeded in creating a universe that functions: '*Beloved* is written in an antiminimalistic prose that is by turns

55 Rushdy 1999 [1992], p. 38.
56 Atwood 1990, p. 43.

rich, grateful, eccentric, rough, lyrical, sinuous, colloquial and very much to the point. […] In this book, the other world exists and magic works, and the prose is up to it.'[57]

Along with such a generally positive aesthetic assessment as this, negative voices were also heard. Stanley Crouch, for instance, attacks the novel for being too bound to the speculative format of popular literature, thereby turning it into ideologised non-art:

> As in all protest pulp fiction, everything is locked into its own time, and is ever the result of external social forces. We learn little about the souls of human beings, we are only told what will happen if they are treated very badly. The world exists in a purple haze of overstatement, of false voices, of strained homilies; nothing very subtle is ever really tried. *Beloved* reads largely like a melodrama lashed to the structural conceits of the miniseries.[58]

Morrison never manages to display the tragic in her characters; she uses them only to thematise or create a political 'case', Crouch continues. Hence the novel is unable to touch its readers, nor is it able to reach the classical-canonical work's 'timelessness': '*Beloved* fails to rise to tragedy because it shows no sense of the timeless and unpredictable manifestations of evil that preceded and followed American slavery, of the gruesome ditches in the human spirit that prefigure all injustice.'[59]

For Crouch, *Beloved* represents a type of deeply problematic use of historical experience. The novel is – at any rate when it comes to the application of African-American history and culture – speculative. Crouch calls it a 'melodrama', an unambiguously negative characteristic.

The debate about *Beloved* helps not only to confirm the novel's importance and relevance, but also to bolster its status as a cultural and political document. The many voices in the debate may be seen as something the novel actively embraces and makes part of itself. In a summarising article about the reception of *Beloved,* Karla Holloway reads the polyphony as part of the novel's historical-cultural genre features. It is, according to Holloway, intended to be part of a choir song:

> Yes, it is derivative. No, it is not a 'ghost story.' It is a spiritual. There is a maelstrom of response surrounding Toni Morrison's latest novel *Beloved*. And that is as it should be. After all, *Beloved* sounds the call of an irre-

57 Atwood 1990, pp. 146–147.
58 Crouch 1987, p. 38.
59 Crouch 1987, p. 38.

> pressible story, and the responses, strident and angry or laudatory and embracing, accomplish the final layer of voicing for a novel that adds to the litany of Morrison's 'talking books'.[60]

The idea of such a *spiritual* becomes a good image of the exchange of conflicting opinions and value judgements that surround a work of literature like Morrison's. Bloom's high and 'apolitical' voice mixes with both Crouch's growling objections and the broad range of political accusations and moral hope found among the novel's admirers. Hence the historical and ideological become an incontestable and irrepressible part of the novel's meaning.

Quality and gender

The belief that readings of literature can never be ahistorical, neutral, and objective, and that they are always governed by underlying ideological positions, has also been a prevalent belief in feminist criticism. Feminists ask concretely which role gender plays in the reading of literature and in the assessment of literary quality. From around 1970 and onwards, many female researchers have asked why there are so few canonised female authors, and why it is 'the great men' who represent literary movements and periods. Is this because women are inferior writers, and if so, why? Did women lack the necessary education? Did they lack access to interlocutors and publishing channels? Did they have too many doubts about their own abilities? Was the lack of canonised female writers possibly due to the fact that all the dominant literary critics were men?

Research on quality and gender has changed in step with how literary criticism generally has changed, meaning that the changes in feminist literary criticism must be considered in view of a paradigm shift in literature studies. Before 1970, of course, there were researchers of literature who highlighted female authors. In 1959, Ellisiv Steen wrote the first Norwegian monograph about a novel by a female writer: *Kristin Lavransdatter* by Sigrid Undset. But the relationship between gender and quality actually became a matter of concern only when literary criticism underwent a clear sociological and political shift. Around 1970, a greater historical awareness was called for as well as new critical strategies of reading. There was also an outright rebellion against the depreciation of female authorship. In *A Literature of their Own* from 1977, Elaine Showalter attempts to establish a female literary canon, and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* from 1979 deals exclusively with

60 Holloway 1989, p. 179.

female authors and their struggle to be recognised. In Denmark, Pil Dahlerup responded powerfully to Georg Brandes with her book *The Women of the Modern Breakthrough* in 1983, published exactly one hundred years after Brandes's seminal work. In Norway, there was focus on feminist literature in special issues of periodicals (for example an issue of *Vinduet* [*The Window*] in 1975), and anthologies of feminist literature and female literary criticism.[61] Not least, the projects *Nordisk kvindelitteraturhistorie* [*The History of Nordic Feminist Literature*] and *Norsk kvinnelitteraturhistorie* [*The History of Norwegian Feminist Literature*] were published (in 1997 and 1990, respectively).

The emergence of a greater awareness about women in literature was bolstered by feminist students and talented young researchers who challenged their teachers' reading lists. In one of the essays in the book *Skrivefest* [*Writing Feast*] from 2005, Tove Nilsen recalls the new assessment by feminists of the canon in the 1970s: 'We scrutinised the reading lists, but found nobody to mirror us, virtually no names of females, only the obligatory Sappho, George Eliot in her male suit and the windblown Brontë sisters.'[62] Feminists often called for female authors to include good female ideals. Good literature for feminists required acknowledgement that women were oppressed, and that there was hope of liberation.

A glance at the Norwegian anthology *Frihet til å skrive* [*Freedom to Write*] from 1981 confirms this perspective. The level of *mimesis* and the illusion of reality formed a main criterion but now seen from a gender perspective. It was expected that female authors would portray female experiences: the careers of Amalie Skram and Cora Sandel were re-evaluated because those two authors showed how difficult the sexual relationship between men and women was and is.[63] On the other hand, an author such as Sigrid Undset was accused of being reactionary and dangerous because she was understood as confirming the view of women as birth-giving machines or as more firmly anchored in nature than men.[64]

It is also interesting that the feminists often highlighted completely different qualities than other literature researchers did at the time. An author's ability to address universal topics may have been a traditional sign of quality, but feminists were rather on the lookout for books where the particular female experience was visible. For them it was not a bad sign if an author wrote in detail about her own life. Rather the opposite: the autobiographical was an almost pervasive feature of all the great female authors of the first

61 Engelstad and Øverland 1981; Hiorth Lervik 1980.
62 Nilsen 2005, p. 46.
63 See Engelstad and Øverland 1981.
64 See Eriksson 1977 and Knudsen 1985.

half of the nineteenth century, and this self-depiction was indeed perceived as enhancing authenticity.[65] Male critics had depreciated Skram's novels of marriage because they were too private and not sufficiently 'universal', whereas *Hellemyrsfolket* [*The People from Hellemyren*] was the text where Skram 'forgets about herself and her own problems', as Georg Brandes wrote in his Skram obituary in 1905.[66] This assessment was now reversed.

There was a strong tendency in feminist literature research to emphasise experience and generally bypass such established Kantian criteria as autonomy, universality and disinterest. Realism, recognisability and political engagement were explicit signs of quality. From the middle of the 1980s, however, researchers began to criticise this tendency. Toril Moi's attack on Elaine Showalter in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) is typical: Moi asserts that Showalter overlooks Virginia Woolf's artistic expression and lessens her reputation by reducing her to an uncertain woman who does not know who she is. Moi wanted – fully in accordance with what was common in literary science at that time – more focus on formal or aesthetic traits in literature. Bearing this in mind, feminists became interested in discussing motifs, narrative techniques and style more than topics and plots. The focus was placed on modernist authors one believed undermined binary gender hierarchies. Ellen Mortensen writes about Cecilie Løveid, for example, that the form is what makes the texts radical and extraordinary; the quality is most visible in Løveid's 'own authentic lyrical prose language'.[67] The criteria for good quality were now that a text should challenge established ideas about what was 'feminine', and what was 'masculine', and that it should draw attention to what was perceived as 'phallocentrism'. Peggy Kamuf writes: 'By feminist one understands a way of reading texts that points to the masks of truth with which phallocentrism hides its fictions.'[68]

The problem with this thinking was that the researchers eventually became embarrassingly aware that they would need to suppress precisely the female author (who no longer existed as a fixed entity), and that they could no longer speak openly about a female tradition or about topics connected to women's experiences. In addition, female writers claimed that they were not women, both because they wished to object to the traditional division into male and female genders, and because they, as women writers, were assessed negatively and outside of 'real' art. That being classified as a woman writer has negative consequences is furthermore obvious, as Unn Conradi Andersen has shown in a

65 See for example Hareide 1999.
66 See Engelstad 1992, p. 12.
67 Mortensen 1997, p. 366.
68 Cited after Langås 2001, p. 103.

study of criteria used in literary criticism published in daily newspapers: literature written by female authors is very often assessed as *melodramatic*, *self-exposing* and *pathetic*, terms that are hardly ever used about male authors' writing.[69]

Feminist criticism has for this reason increasingly turned questions relating to quality assessment into a matter of theory. There are many recent studies of critical concepts traditionally applied in literary judgements and obviously charged with gender politics. Feminist philosophers such as Cornelia Klinger have, for example, argued that the contrast between the beautiful and the sublime has always been gendered: the sublime has generally been understood as the masculine, and not least connected to the male Romantic genius. In 'On the Sublime' Schiller writes:

> Beauty, under the shape of the divine Calypso, bewitched […] Ulysses, and the power of her charms held him long a prisoner in her island. For long he believed he was obeying an immortal divinity, whilst he was only the slave of sense; but suddenly, an impression of the sublime […] seizes him; he remembers that he is called to a higher destiny – he throws himself into the waves, and is free.[70]

Ulysses is turned into the male artist who long has been bewitched by female beauty before he sublimely and courageously throws himself into the waves and achieves male freedom.

This tendency to theorise the basis for quality judgements is found not only in close readings of the quality concepts of literary criticism, but also in feminist literary criticism itself: Texts discussing its gender politics framework, such as Swedish Lena Andersson's novel *Egenmäktigt förfarande* [*Wilful Behaviour*] (2013), are now often considered good. Texts that bypass insight contributed by feminist literature criticism are relentlessly criticised.[71]

Conclusion: Hemingway's qualities

We have now considered a 250-year-long dialogue about quality, first from the perspective of continuity, then from the perspective of a possible break with the tradition. The dialogue has been found to continue despite the criticism, albeit with a new awareness about what has previously been excluded, forgotten or suppressed. The traditional criteria live on, but often in modified

69 Andersen 2009.
70 Schiller 1884, p. 143.
71 See for example Ebba Witt-Brattstrøm's comments about Karl Ove Knausgård's *Min kamp* series which was printed in *Dagens Nyheter* in 2015.

form. Originality may mean something else to a realist than it does to a modernist, and something else to a woman than to a man.

If we return to Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, we can truly say that there is no agreement on how to read it, including the final scene, which is at least as full of *understatement* as anything else in the book. The restless and alcoholic Lady Brett Ashley, who has lost her great love in the war, and the journalist Jake Barnes, injured in the war (rendering physical love with Brett impossible), probably are, as the book ends, more distanced from each other than ever before. Commentators disagree, however, about who has learnt the most. Linda Patterson Miller writes:

> As Brett rests comfortably against Jake in the taxi in Madrid, she seems at peace for the first time in the novel. Her final statement to Jake […] reflects her sad but realistic recognition of time lost.
>
> In the themes of appearance and reality, and of personal growth and self-realization, *The Sun Also Rises* is very much her novel, and she stands at the center of it, beautiful, vulnerable, and finally herself.[72]

Brett's centrality is far from indisputable. 'Whose novel is it anyway?' Harold Bloom asks, and is in doubt about the answer. He calls Brett 'the nymphomaniac and alcoholic aristocrat roaring through the twenties', but gives her moral support at least on a par with the men: 'Her inconsistency is an aspect of her freedom, and implicitly she refuses male modes of moral judgement.'[73] It is slightly more common to see the narrator Jake Barnes as the book's moral centre. Linda Wagner-Martin states about the ending: 'For the first time in the novel, Jake's great love of the mysterious, forthright "new woman" […] begins to diminish.'[74] Barnes is now finally free of his obsessive love, and his final line shows stoic self-control which always appeared to be Hemingway's ideal (*grace under pressure*). Another female commentator writes: 'Jake has erect and vigorous within him – if not without – a source of masculinity too potent to allow him to be taken for a ride. […] Responding to Brett with pity and irony, compassion and control, Jake breaks the circle.'[75] The judgements have no clear gender patterns. Female critics often identify with Jake, and male ones may be drawn to Brett.

A third alternative in the reception is to emphasise the total disillusionment of the novel, as two male critics do:

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72 Miller 1995, p. 182.
73 Bloom 1991, pp. 1–3.
74 Wagner-Martin 1991, p. 4.
75 Vopat 1991 [1972], pp. 103–104.

> Brett takes satisfaction in deciding not to be a bitch, but there is little else to give either of them solace. Brett's closing remark, that they could have had a good life together, elicits only a cynical reply from Jake.[76]
>
> The closing lines confirm his total disillusionment. […] As [Barnes] now sees, love itself is dead for their generation.[77]

There is little disagreement that the complexity of the book is reinforced by the final paragraph and its last two lines. The interpretive dilemmas may even increase the literary intensity, yet there is no reason to overemphasise this effect. The perception of quality will, after all, be fully present long before we reach a conclusion or ponder the final meaning of the book. Nor does a reader have to feel that the enjoyment of the concluding ambiguity is a more elevated literary experience than choosing one reading over the other. A feminist may praise Hemingway for having given Brett the best cards at the end, or may criticise Hemingway for always siding with Jake. She may see the portrait of Brett as male fantasy projection or as a realistic image of a new and free woman. Exactly how a given understanding or interpretation increases or decreases the book's literary value must remain an open question. The further discussion about this issue will be about 'what the text says', and about Hemingway's life and intentions, but also about the values and personalities of the different interpreters. The critic who concisely and eloquently launches a plausible new interpretation which allows us to see Brett and Jake as if 'for the first time' may – at least for a little while – have the upper hand. Nonetheless, the unavoidable subjectivity of any interpretation and any assessment prevents the game from ever ceasing.

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76 Nagel 1996, p. 99.
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Quality and participation in museums

Brita Brenna

'Museum quality', we might declare, as we encounter an object or artefact of high aesthetic value or cultural-historical importance. We might, however, say this with slight hesitation. It appears that in museums the tasks and functions of the quality concept are shifting. Museums are assuming new responsibilities: once places where particularly valuable objects were stored, they are being transformed into venues for dialogue and social inclusion. This transition is by no means absolute, but it is indicative of this change that an upcoming international standard (ISO) for the sector, entitled 'key indicators for museums', includes sections such as 'Renewed interest in the visitor' and 'Social impact of museums'. The intention is to measure the impact of museums, that is, how and to what extent they influence society, and not only the quality of museum artefacts and collections. We may expect that one of the parameters for measuring quality will be *participation*, an important word in today's museum policy and practice. Museum visitors must be involved and activated, and *participation* is the term used to cover and describe many of these varied activities.

What has been termed 'the participatory turn' is a broad cultural phenomenon. We are living in a participatory society according to the evocatively titled *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*.[78] What is actually meant by participation, collaboration or cooperation (or whatever one chooses to call this phenomenon), how it is generated and how we are to assess what is successful and valuable, or failed and worthless, remain as questions still without definitive answers. Is 'quality' a relevant concept when participation is to be discussed, evaluated and promoted? How are we to understand the

78 Delwiche and Henderson 2013.

concepts of quality and participation that surface when we attempt to make such assessments?

As participatory practice has devolved into a popular sport, museums are clearly in the elite division. Museums are social institutions deeply dependent on the surrounding world, affected by shifting educational principles, scientific paradigms, political ideologies and aesthetic forms. They are quick in absorbing and implementing new cultural techniques, and are today venues where various forms of participation are tested and practised. It is pertinent to ask: How is participation evaluated? Should it be evaluated? And not least, is quality a suitable concept when discussing these practices?

Participation is practised variously in museums, and as a concept it accommodates a number of political, aesthetic and financial ideologies. Visitor participation is important in assessing what museums do, but it is unclear which qualities of participation are measured and how participation in general is understood. Do people who wander into a museum and browse an exhibition participate? Or does participation mean a greater level of activation, for example when the museum offers interactive technologies? Participation might take place as collaborative work, engaging museum visitors in exhibition design or collection development. It may entail forms of empowerment, involving museum visitors in decision making about which activities should take place.

Regardless of how we define the concept, participation *per se* appears to have become a quality parameter, a benchmark indicating whether the activity is good and important. Precisely what is measured varies widely. On one hand, the number of museum visitors is reported to museum boards, sponsors and public authorities. A high number of visitors generates much attention and possibly good revenues, and is often a catalyst for funding from public authorities and benefactors. On the other hand, visitor participation has also become a parameter for assessing institutions of culture as qualitatively good: even if the number of visitors is not high, participation is in itself a quality, be it the individual experience of interacting in an exhibition, or minority groups taking part in exhibition projects. Obviously, measuring the number of visitors is easier than assessing how successfully a project has involved its visitors. Hence, both in theory and practice, attempts are made to understand participation in a way that imbues the term 'quality' with a meaning that goes beyond 'popularity'.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to manoeuvre through a sea where quality and participation are navigation markers. Perhaps these two concepts do not even point out the same course for museums: participation is linked to ideals relating to democracy, empowerment and justice, that is, social and political ideals relating to human interaction, whilst museum quality traditionally connotes an orientation towards the artefact or the work. 'Museum quality'

as it was traditionally understood had nothing to do with museum visitors or the quality of the information service in a museum. Rather it was linked to the properties of an artefact. Thus, when cultural institutions are increasingly being assessed according to how they facilitate participation, and when the 'social assignment' is highlighted as one of the main duties in the institutions' work, it is important to explore problems that arise with this stronger focus on 'quality' as an identifiable and measurable entity in cultural policy. The Norwegian White Paper *Kulturutredningen 2014*, The Official Norwegian Report on Cultural Policy (NOU 2013: 4), states:

> Participation in cultural activities gives each individual experiences and opportunities to develop as a person and member of society. Cultural activities provide arenas for belonging and social togetherness. It is also important that cultural activities can train people for participation in an agonistic pluralist society, which is one of the underpinnings of a functioning democracy. These activities shall contribute to developing competence in freedom of expression, which applies both to people's preferred cultural expressions and forms, and to relating to new experiences and the preferred tastes and expressions of other groups and individuals. If cultural life is to function in this manner, it is necessary that importance be attached in cultural policy to such values as education and cultural awareness, innovation, quality and diversity. A cultural life that does not strive for quality will not be able to satisfy other societal tasks.[79]

This excerpt from the report moves from participation to quality, developing and discussing conceptions of democracy along the way. The assumption is that cultural activities afford training in participation in a democratic society. Perhaps this – a functioning democracy – is also the very indispensable link between quality and participation. Even if there are different conceptualisations of the requirements for and qualities of a functioning democracy, radically different versions of participation all seem to give positive connotations to democracy. Quality, on the other hand, is a far more ambiguous concept, which may be linked to elitist ideas of culture. When participation and quality appear together, an investigation into how they are connected in specific cases is called for.

I will first examine how participation is assigned meaning in the culture and museum field today. Further, I will relate how participation has been connected to democratisation in museum historical works since the 1980s. The argument is that when participation is highlighted as a democratisation

79 *Kulturutredningen 2014* [The Cultural Policy Report], Chapter 1.2.

tool today, such highlighting is both a consequence of and an answer to the way the museum has functioned historically.

As a new (cultural) policy is developed in relation to museums today, with participation as an important tool, the issue of what 'museum quality' is should be raised anew. Debates, especially about how to define, evaluate and name participation in artistic practice and aesthetic theory, may help to illuminate broader participation issues in the widely divergent museum landscape. I posit that questions we ask today regarding socially engaged, or relational, art may also be asked of museum projects where participation is important. Questions are posed about what happens to the aesthetic aspect when politics and morals become the parameters for criticism. A similar question may be asked of museums: What happens to the artefacts when social influence and democratic participation become quality criteria?

The expanded concept of participation

How to understand and critically engage with participation? Many consider digital media the ultimate participatory technology: 'Our world is being transformed by participatory knowledge cultures in which people work together to collectively classify, organise and build information.' This is how the editors of *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* describe current developments.[80] They refer to rapid changes, digital network solutions, new social formations and the dissolution of the monopoly held by hierarchical information institutions. What they first and foremost speak of is a development driven by new digital and social media. Technological transformations are thus considered the motive power for what they describe as the 'participatory society'. However, the notion of participation in cultural activities has a history that starts well before the digital era, covering a much broader area than the field of technology. Perhaps new participatory practices are conditions as much as effects of rapid digital changes. As mentioned, in the field of art and culture, participation has been considered an ideal and a goal for several decades now. This has also been the case in political theory and practice, and in dissemination of knowledge and science. When writing about participation here, it is therefore not primarily understood as an offspring of social media and web-based solutions.

The Cultural Policy Report, previously cited, points out the importance of participation, and while the report endeavours to delimit the expanded cultural concept, attempts are also made to define participation in a wide sense:

80 Delwiche and Henderson 2013, p. 3.

> Participation in cultural life thus comprises several forms of activity compared to what is commonly held to be personal activity in a cultural-policy context. Participating in cultural life means something more than simply playing an instrument, singing in a choir or organising a cultural event. It also means being a member of the art and culture public. Attending a concert or a theatre performance, or visiting a museum, listening to a music album, reading a book – all these activities are elements in the exchange of ideas, values and emotions which cultural life consists of.[81]

The 'passive' spectators or listeners, as a public, are thus defined as participants. They participate in a cultural exchange; however, only when the report deals with issues relating to digital technologies does it raise the idea of another form of creative participation. Connecting participation mainly to digital technologies is in itself symptomatic of the distinction made in the literature on participation between passive participation in culture (film, theatre, museum visits) and active and creative participation (most often represented by digital projects). The report insists that participation is just as relevant in both cases, establishing a broad participation concept. This broad concept does not, however, characterise the participatory turn as it is fleshed out in numerous publications, as we shall see. What is being called for and examined is collaborative, creative and democratic participation, and this is also the aspect that has been launched as a new way for museum institutions.

The most prominent and influential representative of the participatory turn in museums is Nina Simon, who in her book *The Participatory Museum* from 2010 provided what may be called a manifesto for what participation in museums can be:

> How can cultural institutions reconnect with the public and demonstrate their value and relevance in contemporary life? I believe they can do this by inviting people to actively engage as cultural participants, not passive consumers.[82]

Simon's diagnosis is that museums have become unimportant in people's lives. By giving the public the opportunity to actively participate, museums may again become important social institutions. Both the diagnosis and the remedy have generated resonance and enthusiasm: museums should now give people the opportunity to be creative participants, not passive consumers, and thereby gain greater legitimacy.

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81 Norwegian Ministry of Culture 2013.
82 Simon 2010, 'Preface'.

In the 1980s and 1990s there was keen interest in reassessing and reappraising the consumer in art and culture programmes. The masses were not passive victims of commercialisation and the cultural expressions of the elite; rather, they were active interpreters and users. The active spectator, or the active consumer, became the hero in a number of narratives ranging from watching TV to shopping. These conceptions, still prevalent in the Cultural Policy Report, helped reassess the value of ordinary consumption of culture, and to show that the consumer was not passive but rather an active interpreter and co-creator. However, this reassessment is still not enough for the new participatory turn. One of the goals today is that 'users' or 'the audience' should join in the production process itself, in decision-making processes and in the creative process, hence contributing to democratisation of politics and cultural life. This shift towards participation dominates in governmental policy in Norway and other Western countries, but is a diversified movement which variously strives to find legitimacy, organisational frameworks and success criteria even outside the realm of state authorities.

In museology, the field that thematises museums as knowledge and social institutions, the participatory turn has gained broad acceptance. Attempts are being made to change museums and make them a new type of social institution. Some paint these attempts as a revolution. In the modern history of museums, three revolutions have occurred, or so the museologists Léontine Meijer-van Mensch and Peter van Mensch maintain: first a paradigm shift in the form of professionalisation around 1900, then the emergence of 'the new museology' around 1970, and finally a new revolution around 2000. This latter paradigm has no name yet, but a keyword is 'participation', they claim.[83] Another museum researcher, Stephen Weil, also speaks of a revolution in museums, but he locates the revolution in the future:

> At some point – probably not more than forty or fifty years into the twenty-first century – the relative positions of the museum and the public will have revolved a full 180 degrees. In their emerging new relationship – already to be glimpsed in a myriad of ways – it will be the public, not the museum, that occupies the superior position. The museum's role will have been transformed from one of mastery to one of service.[84]

In these museological texts, participation is avant-garde, leading the way to the new museum.

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83 Meijer-van Mensch and van Mensch 2011, p. 13.
84 Weil 2007, pp. 32–33.

Sensory media

How new is this new revolution? one might ask. Are museums about to make a full turn, becoming institutions for active participation and service institutions for the public, whereas previously they were venues for the passive presentation of institutionally quality-assured knowledge? To understand whether, and to what extent, such a change is occurring, it is important to zoom in on how museums have performed their social role historically, and investigate what participation museums have afforded. Certain types of participation have always been important in museums. The media historian Anders Ekström has called museums and temporary exhibitions *walk-in media*.[85] As media they have always demanded a form of activity: one has had to travel to the venue, to walk on one's feet, turn one's gaze to the preferred object of study and reach out to touch an exhibit. It has always been necessary to meet exhibitions in museums with attentive, sensory presence, notwithstanding criticism about boring and authoritarian exhibitions. A short museum history can highlight a longer trajectory for participatory practices in museums.

Museum historians have thematised the transition from early-modern collections, which allowed for a varied sensory experience, to the modern museum providing space for a purely optical experience of artefacts or objects.[86] In the early-modern collections, researchers have pointed out, objects were touched, smelled, perhaps tasted, and the visitor was welcomed by someone actively displaying the collection. Things triggered talk; they could be appreciated for their abilities to contribute to good conversation. This appreciation did not apply only to the conversation pieces of art, but also to a myriad of other objects. Admittedly, only a few persons had the opportunity to join this sensory community, engaging in learned and political conversations in the company of the like-minded. Nonetheless, we may characterise the collection room as a venue for conversation about qualities of the artefacts or objects.

Early in the nineteenth century, museums were increasingly opened to the general public. The democratisation of the objects, that is, the opportunities for a larger population to see art and cultural treasures, was accompanied by the withdrawal of objects to closed display cases. Concurrently museums were venues for knowledge transfer from experts to the masses. Visitors were expected to see but not touch, and objects became less identified as conversation partners and rather more as tools to visualise an underlying order. 'Experts' had access to this order. Towards the end of the nineteenth century,

85 Oral communication.
86 See Bennett 1998 and Classens and Howes 2006 for this history.

the 'exhibition' became an important part of the museum's work, as an instrument for knowledge transfer. Earlier museums also showed objects, but the collection was generally on display in its entirety, and it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that discussions arose about how to design exhibitions to give the best aesthetic experience or educational presentation to the visitor. The museum became a medium for knowledge transfer – with the exhibition as the foremost actor.

Behind the exhibition would be the conservator or curator whose task was to ensure that the correct knowledge was exhibited by the museum. Museums were supposed to provide learning, and the goal was the control and strategic exploitation of the exhibition as a learning arena. Museum periodicals and annual reports were replete with discussions about how to present objects in the best possible way. The quality of the exhibition was decisive if museums were to complete their mission. This reform movement, which – not without resistance – discussed museum techniques in periodicals and in conferences from around 1880 and into the first decades of the twentieth century, was focused on the concrete measures needed to make museums places where the highest number of people could be reached with the best possible knowledge. If one reads, for example, the German periodical *Museumskunde* from the 1900s and 1910s, its pages are filled with discussions about what the best display case should look like, how labels should be made in the most scientific manner and which colours were ideal for which exhibited objects. Experts knew the importance of objects, and the mediation's aim was to ensure that knowledge was presented in the best educational and most convincing manner.

In early collections, and eventually in museums, rooms were organised and fitted out so that visitors would sense and experience, becoming enlightened citizens. What changed was the concrete and physical organisation of the room, in tandem with the political thinking that was being materialised.

The political exhibition

In the interwar years, enthusiasm for the exhibition medium was flourishing, and a series of experiments took place. An aim was to include the public in new ways, and make them active co-creators. For many, the goal was to use exhibitions in the service of politics, whether it was liberal or communist, avant-garde or fascist.

One of the people who thematised the political potential of exhibitions was the German cultural critic Walter Benjamin, who wrote a series of exhibition reviews. He was interested in how exhibitions – and other modern media – could contribute to public education and facilitate political change.

The task of the genuinely effective representation is to bring knowledge out from behind closed doors and make it practical, he claimed. 'But what is a "genuine representation"? In other words: What is exhibition technique?' he asked in a review of the exhibition called *Gesunde Nerven*.[87] Genuine representation, or presentation, occurs when the exhibition technique makes visitors active, is Benjamin's answer. He claims, moreover, that those most experienced in this business are the people in the travelling fun fairs and markets. For them the categorical imperative was that a visitor should leave an event as 'a person who has contributed'. This is precisely the quality he praises *Gesunde Nerven* for. The exhibition makes the visitor an active participant, disregarding the optical sense and keeping contemplation at bay. Benjamin claims that surprise – that little shock – and participation are what yield genuine presentations. These are what exhibition technique is about. It should help to wake up the populace, developing political engagement through experimentation with space and time.

In recent times, the interest in museums and the political role of exhibitions may be found in the development of and discussions relating to 'interactivity'. Interactivity has over time become primarily linked to new digital technologies, as has participation. But interactivity also has a history, and in this history we can find important political implications. In museums, interactivity can be considered either a special type of object or a technological installation the public can encounter, or one may speak of interactivity as a type of activity. The concept has a long history, particularly in institutions that have presented scientific or technical knowledge. Examples include Urania in Berlin from 1889, Deutsches Museum in Munich from 1907, and Palais des Decouvertes in Paris from 1938. In the post-war period, Exploratorium in San Francisco is considered a main inspiration for interactive exhibition technologies. The initiator, the physicist Frank Oppenheimer, established Exploratorium in 1969 as an alternative tool for popular enlightenment. He considered interactivity as an opportunity to empower people democratically, the political scientist Andrew Barry claims.[88] By being made active participants rather than passive consumers, visitors would leave the exhibition with a sense of understanding the world around them. Moreover, the important underlying idea was that boundaries between art and science were porous. Since both art and science were dealing with creativity, there was much that united them. Thus, visitors to Exploratorium were invited to understand and feel what it meant to participate in a creative process. Interactivity was therefore a means to create a qualitative change in how people

87 Benjamin 1991, p. 559 (my translation).
88 See the chapter 'On Interactivity' in Barry 2001.

experienced the world around them. By understanding scientific and technological phenomena, the public would also be able to make informed political choices. Exhibits provided training in scientific and artistic practices, allowing empowerment of individuals in contradistinction to institutions that rendered people passive consumers instead of active participants.

In his book *Political Machines*, Barry has studied the development of interactive museum installations with an understanding of interactivity as both a technical solution and a social activity. As Barry sees it, both the content and the purpose of interactive technologies were transformed when they were transplanted from Oppenheimer's Exploratorium to other types of institutions, such as European museums and science centres. Here they have been especially popular as tools used to attract visitors, teaching and generating enthusiasm about the natural sciences. They have as such been criticised for having the opposite effect of that intended. The philosopher Slavoj Žižek has formulated the concept of 'interpassivity', which refers to how opportunities for choice in interactive technologies are fictitious, because the machine acts for the spectator, shifting the visitor's creativity to the machine, which is furnished with a highly predictable pattern of action.[89] Seen in this light, far from making the user active, interactivity makes her increasingly passive because the action has simply been delegated.

Barry believes that the enthusiasm for interactivity may illuminate a new way of political thinking, as a diagram for arranging the relationship between subjects and objects. This is a diagram which enables a new form of politics:

> Whereas discipline is direct and authoritative, interactivity is intended to turn the user (visitor, schoolchild, citizen or consumer) into a more creative, participative or active subject without the imposition of a direct form of control or the judgement of an expert authority. Discipline implies normalisation; the injunction is 'You must!' Interactivity, by contrast, is associated with the expectation of activity; the injunction is, 'You may!'[90]

Barry's analysis does not treat interactivity as an overriding political ideology, but as a practice taking place through various technical devices, one of the major issues being what these practices do to individuals. What and who are activated through these many and sundry interactive solutions? Which forms of democracy are promoted by such a distribution and, not least, how should qualities of such devices and social phenomena be assessed?

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89 As discussed in Barry 2001.
90 Barry 2001, p. 149.

A shift in political practice and thinking may thus be claimed to produce new ways of activating people in cultural institutions in general and museums in particular. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has described a dividing line between a pedagogical and a performative model for democratic policy, a line which illuminates two ways of envisaging individuals as political beings.[91] In the pedagogical model from the 1800s, the emphasis was on educating political citizens. In such a model, one had to be educated to become a political participant. People are not born as political beings, but become them through education. Institutions such as universities, libraries, museums and exhibitions were important for training people so they could make rational choices, and it was first and foremost by acquiring abstract theoretical knowledge that one could participate fully in the political process. In contrast to this model, a political model emerged in the 1900s which had another point of departure, according to Chakrabarty. Here the citizen was not produced through an educative process where schools, universities, libraries and museums were important institutions. Being human implied being political. In this political model, it is not the ability to undertake abstract thinking that allows one access to political matters. Political rights are in principle something we all possess. Such a model gives greater opportunities for various forms of political expression, including those arising from emotions and experiences. Both these models are very much alive today, and in part they work together. However, neither universities nor museums remain unaffected by the performative model – in university policy, professors no longer have the final say, or the authority to exercise higher political judgement. As described earlier, the active involvement of visitors is a goal for the presentation in museums. There has nevertheless been a far stronger shift towards testing and practising a performative policy in museums than in many other venues, not least due to the long history of museums addressing the public in ways that have given opportunities to be present and have access to objects. They are venues for physical experimentation, co-participation and production of the 'small shocks'.

Participation as nightmare

If we are to start from Chakrabarty's distinction, participation in cultural institutions today is not so much about forming citizens as uncovering the resources inherent in people and groups. In an interesting essay on participation and power, Christopher Kelty asks whether the time has come to reconsider what participation is today. A language is required that will make

91 Chakrabarty 2002.

it possible to compare the many forms of participation and the different disciplinary approaches, he claims.[92] An important issue for him in such a comparative perspective is: Who benefits from participation? The participation rhetoric very often says that participation is good for the participant, that different types of participation are about freedom, creativity and expanding democracy. But, Kelty claims, participation is a two-way process.

> Governments now *provide* participatory democracy, citizens are *engaged* by the government or corporations, and publics are constituted, consulted, and used to legitimate decision-making. Similarly, organizations regularly solicit not just purchases or opinions, but participation in innovation, in marketing, and in the creation of lifestyles, cultures and loyalties.[93]

Participation has thus become, as we may interpret it, an instrument of governance, a commercial tool and a point of departure for transformations and improvement. Participation in this perspective will mean not only that the participant is allowed to contribute, but also that the participation will contribute to transforming the very structure and meaning of the organisation or institution. Participation must have a positive effect; as Kelty says, it has a *value*.

Thus, this conception of participation will also lead to objections from those who see the participation idea more as a neoliberal manner of creating acceptance than as a real opportunity to create a difference according to participants' interests. One of the more explicit criticisms comes from theorists and performing artists who consider participation-oriented art and culture to be an expression of a Romantic notion that participants should arrive at a consensus. 'Participation is war', wrote the architect Markus Miessen in the essay 'The Violence of Participation'. He maintains that contribution is often understood as a means of becoming a part of something through active participation and by assuming a specific role. It appears that this role is rarely understood as a critical platform for engagement; instead it is normally defined according to Romantic concepts of harmony and solidarity.[94] Miessen expresses himself in literally violent terms, and his primary aim seems to be to both undermine and develop the participation paradigm. For Miessen the issue is not whether participation leads to positive results in the form of contribution and transformation, or to negative results in the form of war and conflict. Rather, all participation implies elements of conflict, according

92 Kelty 2013, p. 23.
93 Kelty 2013, p. 23 (italics in the original).
94 Miessen 2008.

to Miessen, drawing on one main direction in political theory for at least two decades now, where participation is understood as agonistic, not harmonious, in its essence.

For the philosopher Chantal Mouffe, a democracy must allow for conflict. Democracy must be derived from counterpoints among people who share something. Their relationship is not antagonist in a friend-adversary relationship, but agonistic in an opponent relationship. It is like a game between opponents who share a set of rules, or in Mouffe's words: '[T]hey agree on the ethical-political principles underlying political interaction, but they disagree about the interpretation of these principles'.[95] This is what Mouffe calls 'conflictual consensus', a construct which is carried forward and developed by Miessen and others in their attempts to establish participation as a democratic concept and a practice which does not rely on consensus. Some understandings of participation may be revolutionary, others may collude with capitalism because they end up getting people to join in the exploitation of themselves, Miessen claims.[96]

These are not new thoughts, either for the international museum sector, or for cultural policy in Norway. Mouffe is also cited in the Cultural Policy Report, and the concept of agonistic pluralism used in this report draws on her vocabulary. We should thus not accuse Norwegian cultural policy of being unfamiliar with the different political implications of participatory policies. What we may ask for is help and guidance for distinguishing between, respectively, the qualitatively good and bad participation.

Participatory art

Art historian Claire Bishop has become a controversial critical voice in the assessment of participation-oriented art. Not because she is an opponent of participation-oriented art, but because she finds aesthetics wanting. She has pointed out that the degree of participation and social engagement for artists and critics alike appears to be a more important quality criterion than the aesthetic aspect. In the article 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents' from 2006, she argues that social engagement appears to be immune to criticism. As long as art helps to strengthen social ties it cannot fail. Criteria, she claims, appear to have moved from the specificity of the individual work to a generalised set of moral rules.[97]

95 Mouffe in conversation with Miessen in Miessen 2010, p. 109.
96 Miessen in conversation with Mouffe in Miessen 2010, p. 135.
97 Bishop 2006, p. 181.

Assessments of participation-oriented art are influenced by the fact that participation in itself is a widely recognised political good. In an interview, Bishop asserts that what strikes her most about the participation-oriented art discourse is how it is given its rationale. Activist supporters have an argumentation that overlaps the rationale for neoliberal cultural policy, she claims:

> I do not mean that we should denounce all participatory art as corrupt, I wish only to point out the need for developing different criteria for judging it – criteria less connected to measurable results and more to aesthetics as a sphere where uncomfortable social truths are articulated and made bearable.[98]

Bishop – and others – insists on the importance of a discussion about what makes something into good and important participation-oriented art, given the idea that art is in a field of tension or in conflict between being autonomous and being indissolubly connected to society. These discussions cannot necessarily be transferred to assessments of participatory projects in various types of museums. Production of art and museum activities have different goals and work differently, but the concurrence of the tool used – participation – will be an argument for comparing criteria.

Participation-oriented museum objects

The presentation so far is strikingly deficient. Museum objects appear to have moved increasingly away from the field of vision I have established, in the same way that aesthetics vanished from the art discourse, as described by Bishop. I am not the only one losing sight of objects. In a participation-oriented culture, importance is attached to social relationships, and therefore objects appear to become stranded in a cultural-policy no man's land. Or more precisely: objects and social aspects become filed away in different political, and not the least museum, departments. This is a challenge for the museum field: museums should preferably be exemplary in the care given to their objects – they must be conserved, registered and exhibited in the best ways. But museums must also show care in the way they deal with the public. Not only should they engage the museum visitors, they should also reach out to and find their non-users. If the trend goes towards a revolution in the museums' operations – in the proper sense of the phrase 'a turn towards the public' – museums are also obliged to maintain the quality of the way objects are treated.

98 Interview in Mørland 2011.

'The overriding goal for the Government's cultural policy is higher quality and increased attention to content on the part of the stakeholders in the field', the Ministry of Culture writes under the heading 'Overriding goals' in its funding letter to museums in 2014. Museums should thus contribute not only high quality, but even higher quality, and they must not only be attentive to the content, but also increase this attention. In this wording, it may be possible to catch sight of the problems relating to operationalising quality – 'increased attention to content' is a rather vague definition for an overriding goal.

Perhaps what we are hearing is a careful call for new ways of using objects and participating together. Could it be a call for an object-based participation theory? In recent years we have seen objects and participation unfolding together in several exemplary exhibitions. The foremost example in Norway was the exhibition 'Ting. Teknologi. Demokrati' [Things. Technology. Democracy] which was featured in the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology in Oslo on the occasion of the museum's centennial and the 1814 constitutional anniversary. The questions the exhibition asked were simple: What is technology, what is democracy – and how are they linked? The ambition was thus to consider the objects and more specifically the political potential and limitations of the technologies. The exhibition brought politics into the technologies, and the technologies into politics. Inspiration for this way of working came from science and technology studies which have variously demonstrated how technology has never been exterior to the establishment of democracies, but has been decisive for the formation and effect of the liberal public sphere. In the exhibition, objects were thus assigned decisive importance in politics, with clear references to the exploration by Bruno Latour and other researchers of 'thing politics'.[99]

In the book *Material Participation,* political philosopher Noortje Marres has examined in a very distinct way the role things play in participation.[100] For her, sustainable technologies are the empirical material for studying how different things enable participation, and how such *participatory objects* come about. In other words, and using the terminology of this article: Which qualities must things have to create participation?

On one hand, there is a 'participatory turn' in academia and social life, and on the other hand, a 'material turn' in a number of disciplines. The challenge is to consider these turns together. If we follow Marres, two turns are taking place. One is concerned with how participation is a growing phenomenon, as in 'we are living in a participation culture' – and it usually implies a normative standpoint referring to the fact that participation is something

99 See Latour 2005.
100 See Marres 2012.

good that ought to take place. The other turn, the material turn, asserts that objects and things are constitutive for any social grouping, and that one cannot understand the policy or change it without 'material' considerations. While the participatory turn is interested in identifying the new, the material turn places more attention on understanding the social in a material perspective, including past societies. The history of 'participation' may be told as a cooperation between people and objects. Hence, looking at these turns together may open up for thinking about quality in participation as an empirical question that may be examined historically and with an interest in the importance of the material – the things – in these processes. When in this article I have been interested in how materiality has created room for different sensing and political opportunities, it has been precisely to point out how museums are venues where a politics of things can be tested.

The good news is, of course, that so many museum practitioners today are focused on promoting quality in processes where participation is created in and through objects. Numerous attempts are being made to counteract the split between politics and materiality, between the social and the artefacts. Some people are also making such attempts in qualitatively good ways; they are creating objects that have various forms of implications for participation, either consensual or with a high conflict level. The problem is that this activity may appear to be under-emphasised in both cultural policy and recent museological literature. It is therefore not unreasonable to conclude by encouraging further empirical studies of 'museum quality' – understood as the participatory qualities of museum objects.

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Culture, quality, and human time

Frederik Tygstrup

'It's hard to argue against success!' This idea, as expressed by Ronald Reagan, has been persistent in modern discussions of artistic quality. Success in the marketplace speaks for itself and is somehow easier to defend than criteria of quality defined by a cultural elite, leaning on exclusive communities of taste, on the authority of cultural heritage, on the value of experiment and innovation – in brief, on different social definitions of criteria for cultural capital.

In the modern welfare state, however, there has been a special and interesting alliance between these two ideas of quality, between 'what people want' and 'what can be underwritten as good'. It has been a cultural-policy ambition to promote quality in the second sense, typically through various forms of support to art and culture administered by peers, but also to make this quality accessible to a broad public, or in other words, to disseminate cultural capital.

Modern cultural policy has manoeuvred between two ways of recognising quality: the recognition of the market and the recognition of peers. Two very different social infrastructures correspond to these modes of recognition. The first is basically an industrial infrastructure – richly analysed from Adorno to Scott Lash – which has been implemented to produce for a market. The second infrastructure is institutional and produces communities of taste: academies, universities, publishing houses, media, and so on, that is, institutions which codify the distinctions that define cultural capital, as authoritatively described by Pierre Bourdieu.

Both these infrastructures are, however, undergoing change today. In this article, I analyse these changes, separately and in relation to their interaction, not least with a view to how this interaction affects the cultural policy of the welfare state. On one side, we have a market-based culture where the traditional business models are changing, not least due to the huge wave of digitalisation in recent decades, which also has major consequences for the production of culture. On the other side, there is a transformation of the traditional idea of *Bildung*, which has shifted from a rather anthropological

paradigm (inherited from the classicist idea of education) to a contemporary critical paradigm. Both these developments imply new ways of mobilising consumers of culture, which in turn modify the idea of quality. The concluding perspectives in my contribution concern the new forms of temporality which accompany such a contemporary understanding of quality.

Cultural industry 2.0

The cultural industry infrastructure today is driven by new forms of feedback between production and the market. Earlier there was a relatively simple trial-and-error structure in cultural-industry production. The planning and fabrication of cultural products were based on assumptions about the market and made use of producers with extensive experience of market trends. This process is essentially experimental, and everyone knows anecdotes about striking exceptions, monumental flops, and unexpected successes. However, the new availability of vast amounts of user data is changing this situation. Detailed data documenting how very large populations use digital works – texts, film, music – allow new forms of complex modelling, calculating the optimal composition of new cultural products by using the collected consumer data. Insight into the consumption habits of users – what is emphasised, shared, skipped, returned to – opens for new microengineering of market-oriented works. The entire population becomes a focus group, and the experiment, the surprising new take, loses its standing correspondingly.

We may thus envision a situation where production for the market becomes recursive, a loop structure where each reaction to a product is instantly captured and embedded in new versions. The intuitive handling of a book, a film, or a playlist is recorded as feedback, which can be included in the production of improved versions. Consumers cease to be merely purchasing a specific good; rather, they become active co-players in the development of new versions of this good. This situation has two consequences. On the one hand, it means that consumers increasingly act as producers: when I purchase a product from Netflix, Amazon, Google, Apple, etc., I simultaneously contribute to optimising the production processes of those companies by supplying real-time data they can use to calculate and translate into product enhancements, or sell to their suppliers. On the other hand, the cultural-industry producers have an exceptional opportunity to customise their performance for a group of customers they know increasingly well.[101]

101 See for example Carr 2013 and Streitfeld 2013.

The consistent exploitation of user data entails that the consumer contributes to the product, not by having an opinion about it, but rather by *doing* something with it: emphasising, sharing, turning off, skipping, and whatever else may be registered. Instead of a reflective reaction, an *affective* reaction is recorded, an unspoken judgement implicit in the intimate handling of a product. Moreover, this data material is useful not only on an individual level, because it can be aggregated into large data sets where individual preferences are collated and processed, making it possible not only to ascertain how each individual wants the product, but also to calculate how different reaction patterns can be collated to optimise the product for the average consumer.

For the consumer, the quality enhancement achieved in this way will probably at first glance appear to be inspirational and tailor-made, but possibly also in a slightly odd manner. First, odd because the optimised product satisfies something one may not be immediately aware of, the embracement of an affective impulse through which one is presented to a self one does not quite know – a more intimate and immediate self than the image of the self one has: one's own affect in an objectivised form. Second, odd because this encountered affect is not fully one's own, but some calculated average based on coding of market segments and interpretation of affective reactions the producers now have at their disposal. The perception of quality departs from a preference of taste, but it is now based in part on affective microengineering, and in part on an elaborately aggregated data set.

Quality, the purchase argument, here rests on a form of self-recognition because the consumer has personally helped develop and produce the object. However, this is also an eerily distorted self-recognition, where you are both yourself and not yourself, the ripple of an affect, enlarged and diluted. Luciana Parisi has characterised the mode of production that exploits this connection as 'affective capitalism': 'Affective capitalism is a parasite on the feelings, movements, and becomings of bodies, tapping into their virtuality by investing preemptively in futurity.'[102] What is quality here? An objectivisation of something you did not even know you were. A form of almost intimidating interpellation. You hardly have time to react before you are re-defined … What is perceived as quality is a form of captured spontaneity: you feel affected by something, make a note of something, express yourself through something – and immediately this something returns to you, telling you who you are because it caught you in a spontaneous reaction. The evanescent present moment is captured and frozen, and thereafter invested in futurity: not the you that you could become, but you in a guise formatted by the

102 Parisi and Goodman 2011, p. 163.

algorithms that have trawled the sea of data you are part of. You supply the reactions yourself, then others tell you who you are.

This image of the present situation is really not that different from the famous analysis by Adorno and Horkheimer of the function of cultural industry, only now further enhanced. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the real puzzle in cultural industry was that the oppression they considered as its quintessence was in reality achieved through consensual consumption. With this new paradigm for affective engineering, this mechanism becomes clearer; with the optimised feedback between production and consumption, the cultural-industry production places itself strategically in the minute interval between an affect and a self-perception. If you are harbouring this still homeless affect, we can offer you this version of your self …

Cultural capital

What happens then, on the other hand, to the quality system which was based on social distinction and on the taste community of a culture elite? As an ideological stance, this system is being de-legitimised by the neoliberal introduction of market-like mechanisms in still more social areas, as they only barely tolerate a value argument that cites tradition. Moreover, the communities of taste themselves have become increasingly complex so that the distinctions of taste serve not only to differentiate high from low culture, but also to distinguish various cultural segments and subgroups from each other. Cultural capital is thus no longer a given value based on tradition and a relatively homogeneous culture of *Bildung*, but now has to constantly prove itself through the distinction processes in which it takes part.

Content-wise, the criteria for quality that characterised the inherited culture of *Bildung* come down to three core elements that typically would be included in a quality assessment: first *traditionality*, where the quality of a cultural artefact hinges upon its ability to relate to earlier works and artistic forms which it has as its context; second *innovation*, that is, that it transforms the tradition-given content under the impression of a present context; and third its *coherence*, that is, that the artefact displays a coherent and consistent inner organisation.

These three intuitively self-evident criteria are all written into what Jacques Rancière has called the 'aesthetic regime' of modern art. The classical regime of art, which in Rancière's periodisation dominated until the breakthrough of Romanticism at the start of the nineteenth century, was characterised by relatively stable quality criteria, embedded in the rule-based aesthetics and poetics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a focus on what one might call 'correctly executed works'. In the aesthetic

regime – and in accordance with post-Romanticism's dynamic perception of history – the decisive factor is now less conformity with received rules than critique of inherited conventions. This change implies a different relationship to tradition, where it no longer is only about honouring it and complying with its demands, but rather about entering into a dialectic relationship with it, partly taking over and internalising its insights and ideas, and partly also transcending it, acknowledging that ideas and forms extracted from tradition must be transformed and developed to still make sense and be relevant for a new age.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this dialectic between tradition and innovation has decisively informed the perception of quality. The quality of a cultural product comes with its ability to crystallise a formal articulation and a thematic universe in a manner which both reaps and completes inherited ideas by giving them a suitable articulation in a new situation. The third criterion, finally, the question of 'coherence', is precisely focused on this idea of giving form, of creating a sensorily accessible and appealing figure that can express and execute the negotiation between tradition and situation. It is a decisive characteristic of this modern idea about quality that the appearance of the work and the sensory feeling of well-being it may invoke should be not only a matter of taste and random personal preferences, but rather that the appearance or shape should be *adequate*: that the work should do justice to the tradition's formal repertoire, transcending it and adding something that breaks out of tradition while also breaking into the contemporary. Coherence concerns a sense of the necessity of form: the work must appear just so – not to satisfy my senses, but to create a convincing sensory correlative to the challenge the situation in question poses to the dominating tradition. The coherent appearance is not a packaging of historical content, but its manifestation. Adorno used the term 'attunement' (*Stimmigkeit*) to point out that the work's appearance depends not only on our conventions for agreement between the individual elements and between the elements and the whole, but also on how the inner agreement is tuned *according to* something – to the correct point of articulation between tradition and innovation.

The fact that cultural capital has maintained such a substantial value throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may be because it not only has been an expression of a taste community with its inclusive and exclusionary mechanisms (even though it has also had this function), but also has been closely connected to a mode of experience. The three quality criteria of the aesthetic regime constitute a reflexive relationship to the surrounding world. Quality in cultural products refers to how they place themselves strategically in relation to the two dimensions of tradition and situation, and how they are thus able to develop ways of seeing the world from this vantage

point. If this is a kind of 'objective' triangulation of the place of cultural quality, it gives the subjective side correspondingly: quality enables an aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience provides the concept of quality with a social dimension.

Aesthetic experience is obviously a way of dealing with sensory experience and sensory forms, but the idea of aesthetic experience also goes further, combining an experience object (experiencing an aesthetic object) with a way of experiencing (experiencing with or by means of an aesthetic object). In this sense, cultural capital is not only something individuals may possess as a sign of their distinction, it is also something a society possesses. Cultural capital is the contingency store of experience embedded in cultural forms, artefacts, and conventions.

This is the true rationale for the importance of quality in culture: quality bespeaks our ability to experience the world, absorb the world as it appears, understand it through the changes it is going through, inscribing our individual time into the common time of our world, the current social time as well as the historical past. This link between the social, the existential, and culture as a form of experience leads back to one of the fundamental ideas of the aesthetic regime: Schiller's idea about the aesthetic education of man. For Schiller, aesthetics is not an artifice, it is an anthropological lodestar. Aesthetics is about perceiving the world, being able to form meaningful images of the world, and first and foremost being able to develop oneself through this ongoing process of experience. And culture is the medium in which these processes play out.

The idea of *Bildung*, which during the nineteenth century deteriorated into a rigid mindset stuck on curricula, manners, and discipline, was originally a utopian anthropology that saw man as a historically emergent being who through the process of experience realises his potential by transcending himself. This is the hopeful anthropology which (at least ideologically) has informed the efforts of the modern welfare state to promote cultural quality, in a combination of Schiller's bourgeois utopia of the power of individual experience to transcend itself and a social vision about disseminating this privilege to the masses.

It is not too difficult today to still underwrite such an aesthetic ideal of *Bildung* and the idea of quality it carries with it. Nor is it difficult, though, to see that the present de-legitimation of this ideal – through the neoliberal debunking of the idea of a common culture as a fundamental social mechanism, as well as the hyper-rationalisation of the contemporary cultural industry – decisively challenges the quality ideas of the Romantic philosophy of enlightenment.

Culture, quality, and human time

For Schiller, experience is not a question of learning something, but of *playing*. The crux of Schiller's anthropology is man's inherent 'pulsion to play', to learn by experimenting, to devote oneself to the outcome of the play, to become another in exchange with others. It is precisely the open and aspirational nature of this process that motivates the idea of transcendence so deeply embedded in his understanding of culture and quality. In this sense, the conflict between the quality regime of the market and that of the *Bildung* ideal concerns nothing less than the social production of subjective time.

The cultural industry's anticipatory recirculation and codification of contingent affects through computer-driven production forms optimises coordination between producers and consumers. It designs products to satisfy future needs by articulating emergent structures of feeling that can be traced in current consumption patterns. Put differently, it constructs a demand that is not yet aware of itself, consolidating a present situation as a future ideal. The ideal of *Bildung* operates with another type of future, one which is based on an open horizon of aspirations.

The two regimes differ in the ways they consider the relationship between the present and the future. The first consolidates the current, shoving the present into the future, while the second will open for what might be a future potential in the present. For the latter, experience shifts forward into an expectation. For the former, expectation translates into the optimisation of an experience that has already occurred.

Although it is not common to think about cultural quality in terms of temporality, there may actually be a growing need to do so today. When the modern welfare state decided to support quality in art and thus give cultural practices a break from market demands and to allow art to be dispersed in society beyond the narrow circle of the educated elite, that support was based on an idea of creating a better society, a society with enlightened citizens, with widely available joys and pleasures from the cultural field, with ideas and aspirations for a better future.

The increasing marketisation of society has eventually changed this agenda.[103] The hierarchy between market and society has been reversed, and the market is no longer considered to be in the service of society. Instead, the laws of the market and the services it provides now constitute the horizon of society. Therefore, we notice a rising tension between two kinds of cultural products: those that aim to satisfy contemporary needs, and those that see the present as a place where the future begins.

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103 See Sandel 2011.

Market-based quality has always been about the ability to satisfy a recognised and immediate need. What is new is the previously unheard-of systematisation of this market logic, which is getting better and better at connecting permanent and systematic recursive bonds between need and satisfaction, as part of the increasingly pervasive penetration of society's texture. Laurie Anderson already coined a description of this phenomenon in the 1980s: 'Paradise is exactly like where you are right now, only much, much better!' Or, in Mark Fisher's more theoretical parlance: 'What we are dealing with now is not the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their *precorporation*: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture.'[104]Against this trend, we might indeed defend the culture of *Bildung* and the qualities of traditionality, innovation, and coherence in cultural production. But it is also clear that the most prominent of these qualities will now be the one of innovation – the ability to imagine that something may be different from how it is now.

The British theorist Irit Rogoff has developed a concept of 'criticality,' which might inform this understanding of quality. Criticality is not about critique in a classical Kantian sense – the analytical examination of structure, role, and function. Nor is it about being 'critical' – about taking a stance and making a judgement. Criticality is about entering into an open interaction with an object (not pre-defined by a scientific method or by a political position), in a negotiation based on this shared indecision. One might say that criticality answers the increasing over-representation of the market with a strategic under-representation of quality criteria. Quality ceases to be a 'this' – a *quale* – rather becoming a question of 'how': how cultural activity can launch processes that do not consider the future as an optimised now, but rather as transcending the now based on a critical understanding of the character of the now.

Quality in cultural production will thus be about something as fundamental as putting us in possession of time as an open horizon for something different. It does not need to be a case of breathing new life into radical utopias, nor probably a nostalgic promotion of old *Bildung* ideals (or at any rate only as a faint reflection), but rather a case of breaking out of the immanent bubble of contemporaneity supported by an increasingly integrated market system. The market has been described correctly as an eminently dynamic organisational form, but the dynamic also has a strong reproductive character: it creates solutions which strengthen the infrastructure of the market. Again: it offers us the time of optimisation, but rarely that of transformation.

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104 Fisher 2014, p. 9 (italics in original).

In defence of habit

The two forms of temporality are connected to two forms of subjectivation, two ways of producing subjectivity. To make this connection clearer (without speaking too abstractly about 'subjectivity') I would like to introduce an additional concept, that of 'habit'. The Danish historian Hartvig Frisch stated in the 1920s, 'Culture is habits'. Distancing himself from the monumental and museal understanding of culture, he took an interest in the mundane reproduction of human forms of life – culture, not as a cult of the elevated, but as cultivation of ordinary everyday matters. The centre of this cultivation is habit, the repetition and reproduction of patterns and practices of life. It refers to the ways we do things, what we are socialised to consider natural, how we apply specific pre-understandings to the situations we experience, and in turn refers to how the situations eventually develop.

In the modernist avant-garde movement, artistic quality was considered the ability to depart from this habit. Art, Maurice Blanchot stated, is what breaks with culture, or in the same vein in Proust, what breaks with habit. Culture is habit, and art, or more precisely what characterises artistic quality, is the deviation from habit. This thinking and the apparent conflict between the indolence of the habit and the astringent and shocking advent of the new, however, also cover a close connection between these two opposite poles. Habit and the new counteract each other, but they also work together. The break with a habit reforms it, and that which stands out is again integrated in the habit to the extent the new idea is 'automated', as it was labelled in formalist aesthetics. The qualitative new breaks with the habit, but also contributes to changing the habit, giving it a new quality, new content, which then again lapses back into the habitual and in the next instance must be reformed.

Extending this idea, we may link two different forms of temporality to the habit: one to the habit as repetition which reproduces the same, and one to the habit as a transformative resumption and incorporation of something new. This dual perspective on the temporality of habit was developed by the French philosopher Félix Ravaisson in the mid-nineteenth century. Ravaisson highlighted the productive nature of the habit, its ability to produce synthesis, to set up efficient routines by adopting semiautomatic patterns, in opposition to the prevailing idea formulated by Descartes and Kant, that habit is a state of sluggishness and mindless automatism.

For Ravaisson, habit is a form of intelligence, a way of handling complex situations by automating the processing of them. Habit in Ravaisson's analysis is a way of connecting receptivity and spontaneity, a relationship between receiving an impression, or more generally, to be affected and undertake an activity which 'responds' to the affect. Habit, thus, cannot be simply

discarded as a poor property (habit as blindness) or elevated as something good (habit as intelligent handling). The evaluation of habit depends on the quality of the temporality it enacts.

There are two questions involved in this assessment of the quality of the habitual reaction. First: What occurs in the deflection, the reaction where habit translates affect into action, receptivity into spontaneity? Does the deflection have a characteristic form, does it have subjective originality, as it were? And second: Does it reveal a form of temporality? Does it create a difference between a before and an after, or does it reproduce without making any difference? Both these questions explore the ability to transform something into something else, to produce something new out of something given (in other words, creativity in the cultural practice).

With Ravaisson's two versions of habit, one reproductive and one transformative, we are brought back to the two forms of temporality we have considered in the question of cultural quality. If we consider culture as a system of habits, our two quality paradigms – simplified we may call them the algorithm-based cultural industry and the community-based criticality – emerge as examples of a respectively reproductive and transformative formation of habit. If we now return to the idea that culture is habit, and to my claim that the issue of quality in culture may be said to be about whether the cultural activity creates an opportunity for human time, we may, using Ravaisson's differentiation between intelligent and non-intelligent habits, posit two forms of time: on the one hand, a time that is recursive, returning to the confirmation of something already given, and on the other hand, a time that is transformative, creating habits through modification, development, and transformation of the given.

The former corresponds to the logic of the commodity, which the Frankfurt school (and many after them, most recently, for example, Rosi Braidotti in *Transpositions*) identified as characteristic of the cultural industry, and which still characterises the new production logic which increasingly anticipates the future by looping back to information already collected about earlier consumption and valorising this anticipation through new products. The latter corresponds to the idea of criticality I mentioned earlier, a non-normative process of mutual transformation.

The American media scholar Wendy Chun has suggested that the interest in resuming and developing the concept of habit in contemporary cultural analysis – a decisive moment here is the American translation of and introduction to Ravaisson by Catherine Malabou – should itself be considered in light of the neoliberal wave which since the 1980s has replaced state- and society-based communities with individual-based value appraisals:

> [T]he fact that habit is arguably what culture can be and is in the era of neoliberalism, in an era in which, as Margaret Thatcher argued, there is no society. […] In place of society and government as positive entities that extend sympathies, create loyalties, and correct inequalities, we have the reification, manipulation, and extension of habits.[105]

In this way, one may perceive habit as a new condition: cultural reproduction increasingly resorts to development and transformation of habits, whereas the traditional mechanisms of the welfare state to distribute quality and promote it are becoming increasingly marginalised. It is precisely in this light that a renewed and contemporary reflection on cultural quality would benefit from using as its point of departure habits and a more nuanced understanding of the potential for experience that the formation of habits also implies. To the extent that we no longer trust the social state as the body which produces 'sympathies and loyalties' through consensus-borne quality criteria, there is reason to examine mechanisms that form habits which extend beyond the cultural-industry strategies for marketing the reproductive habit.

By considering habits and the formation of habits as potential forms of experience, we gain the opportunity to see cultural quality as something that pertains not only to cultural products in a narrow sense, but also to the forms of time and perceptions of time afforded by these products – the habits they might cultivate. Hence, quality refers to cultural practices that reproduce an experience of time as an open and transformative horizon instead of a mere repetition of the same. The dual understanding of habit as both reproductive and transformative gives us an opportunity to discuss cultural quality in a way that initially does not focus on cultural *products*. Instead we can focus on the dynamic in the cultural practices that play out *around* the specific cultural products. In addition to assessing projects, works, and artefacts, we may thus shift our attention to the relations and processes they afford – the movement they launch, and the environments that crystallise around such movements. What would constitute sustainable environments for the consolidation of intelligent cultural habits? How do we promote the production, circulation, and reception of practices that create transformative habits in the cultural landscape today?

105 Chun 2014, p. 703.

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‘That was bloody good!’ On quality assessments in artistic work processes

Ingrid M. Tolstad

Discussions about quality in the arts and culture field tend to focus on artistic expression. Whether it concerns a painting, a sculpture, a play, a film, a text or a pop song, the main question is often whether *the product* is up to standard. Creative processes giving rise to these artistic expressions are – naturally enough – not usually accessible to critics or audiences. Therefore, often the artistic expression itself or the culture producer’s retrospective narrative has been subjected to analysis, assessment and speculation. The same applies to research on the arts and culture. Christopher Small has pointed out, among other things, that music research has often linked the concept of ‘music’ to *the work*, where the attributes, meanings and aesthetic qualities assigned to such works emerge through academic interest and analysis.[106] Such a perspective is nuanced, of course, by artistic expressions not presented as finished works, but where the artistic process continues through the audience’s interaction with performances or installations.

The act of producing artistic and cultural expressions can be defined as a process in which a number of different elements are *brought together* in specific ways to become *something*. In line with Bruno Latour’s perspectives, a *thing*, or an expression, can be understood as an object in the world and simultaneously as a *gathering* – something that is assembled together.[107] What emerges from this collection process will depend both on *which* elements and factors are brought into the composition and on *how* they are brought together. The specific form given to an artistic expression will thus be the

106 Small 1998, p. 3.
107 Latour 2004, p. 233.

result of the many choices made by the art producer(s) during the process. Since each such choice involves assessing which alternative(s) will be best for the (imagined) artistic product, these choices can thereby be understood as a kind of quality assessment. Artistic and cultural expressions will thus be *outcomes* of such assessments. An expression deemed to be of high quality (in whatever sense) can thereby be said to result from what Odd Are Berkaak calls a 'quality process' where 'specific factors are brought into contact with each other, triggering a course of events'.[108]

So far, what transpires on the way to the goal, what happens *under way* in creating artistic and cultural expressions, has not been sufficiently emphasised in existing understandings and discussions of quality. Insofar as attention is given to the process's significance, this is often done in advance, for example when members of the Arts Council's expert committees assess *planned* production processes in their allocation rounds. It is also present in critics' assessments and in academic research on interactive works, installations and performances where the artistic process continues in the public domain.

This ethnographic investigation of quality assessments in creative work processes reflects my ambition to introduce a process-analytical perspective to the ongoing discussion of quality.[109] In line with the project's ethnographic approach, the goal has not primarily been to identify existing *etic* categorisations of quality in artistic work processes, that is, to investigate whether it is possible to recognise established understandings of quality in what is observed. The focus has been more on how understandings and assessments of quality are expressed *emically*, that is, how cultural practitioners in different fields themselves express and conduct such assessments.[110] Here, therefore, I employ a wide-ranging understanding of quality that focuses on how practitioners assess and prioritise what is good or bad, using a number of different considerations, during their work processes.

About conducting research on creative processes

Conducting research on artistic work processes requires a methodological approach that enables such processes and their inherent evaluations to be observed and documented. In this project, I have therefore conducted fieldwork in two Norwegian creative undertakings. I have been a fly on the wall

108 Berkaak 2016, p. 69 (my translation).
109 Barth 1966. In a process-analytical perspective, social and cultural expressions are understood as continuous *outcomes* of human interaction, and the focus is on describing and analysing such generative processes.
110 Kottak 2006, p. 47.

at a ten-day commercial songwriting camp (Campen) and I have followed an experimental theatre group (Teatergruppa) during their development of a new production. The use of fieldwork and (participatory) observation as a method depends on the possibility of 'being there when it happens'. Following creative processes at close hand, while they are taking place, produces different information and knowledge than listening to participants talk about them afterwards.

Campen is a songwriting gathering held yearly in one of Norway's biggest cities. It is divided into national, Nordic and international parts. Around 100 songwriters participated in the camp. The camp's goal is to produce songs that can be placed with international artists of high standing, but the camp also serves as a training, recruitment and network-building forum for young, inexperienced songwriters. Depending on their roles as either *producers* (who are responsible for programming, instrumentation, recording and sound production) or *top-liners* (who are responsible for the lyrics and melody), songwriters were put together in teams to work in *co-writing sessions*, where they were given a deadline of a day and a half to present a finished pop song. In the next round, new constellations of songwriters were put together to again come up with a song within the deadline. After each sub-camp (national, Nordic, international), listening sessions were held at which established music industry figures gave their feedback on the songs. During Campen's ten days, I followed eight songwriting teams during their writing processes, and participated in information meetings, joint listening sessions and the concluding party. I also spoke to people during breaks and lunches.

The award-winning and critically acclaimed Teatergruppa is regarded as one of Norway's leading experimental theatre groups. When I followed them, there were generally six people involved: the performers Sa, So, A and F, dramaturg C and producer P. It was the first time dramaturg C had been involved, whereas Sa, A and F have been with Teatergruppa since its inception nearly 20 years ago. The group has a relatively flat structure, where everyone participates actively in the ideas and development process, although F mainly took the director's role. P was largely busy with administrative duties and was therefore little involved in creative work. I followed them for six months, during which I was present at irregular intervals during (parts of) their work sessions. Most sessions took place on the group's own premises or in other rehearsal venues. I also attended the performance of the finished production.

These two cases do not just represent different genres and forms of expression, they also operate in and target different segments of the cultural field. Whereas an experimental theatre group primarily addresses a narrow, enlightened, avant-garde–oriented audience, Campen focuses on songwriting as a profession and craft involved in producing hit songs having broad

commercial appeal. Teatergruppa is to a greater extent a recipient of public funding, for example from Arts Council Norway, whereas Campen is more business and market oriented, although it is partly funded by the local business community and local, regional and national funding schemes. These two cases thereby have breadth in their position and approach to art, commercialisation and business.

The choice of cases was made according to an ambition to comparatively analyse cultural actors in different fields, who have different points of departure, goals and ideological values. Within the field of anthropological cultural research, Fredrik Barth has argued in favour of the analytical value of 'seeking out diversity', because variation enables researchers to describe how different aspects of cultural forms and expressions are connected and interdependent.[111] In other words, comparing a commercially oriented songwriting camp with an experimental theatre group can help answer questions about what differences and *similarities* can be identified in assessments of, and negotiations about, quality that take place in different types of (artistic) fields of practice.

A principal reason for choosing the cases in question was that they both take place as *collective* processes, where several individuals work *together* to create songs or theatrical productions. The choices made and the reasons for them are expressed in the actors' reflections and conversations about what they are doing. Discussions and disagreements thereby help to highlight the motives, preferences and freedom of action of different actors. Precisely this verbalised interaction makes it possible to gain access to the quality assessments conducted and to the artistic choices made. It would have been much more difficult to gain access to the same processes by studying individual artists. Individual artists also create their work in interaction with their surroundings, through using historical references, different sources of inspiration and input from others, access to materials, requirements from (public) funding sources and ongoing dialogue with exhibition venues, collectors and their (artistic) circle. In many ways, then, they are as social and collective in their practices, but gaining access to their 'inner dialogue' would have been a methodological challenge.

Worth mentioning is that, although assessments and negotiations about quality were certainly part of the conversations and discussions that played out in creative processes I followed, the actual *term* 'quality' was virtually never used. One crucial element in this ethnographic work has therefore been to identify in what other ways quality assessments are expressed, in both word and deed.

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111 Barth 1999, p. 82.

To jump in or think twice

When songwriters or theatrical performers gather to create something, the process is dependent on their *doing* something – singing a few lines, creating a pattern of movement or writing a text – which, in turn, is combined with other bodily movements, drum rhythms and vocal phrases. How they went about doing so was rather different, however, in the two creative undertakings I investigated. The following description of the introductory rounds of a songwriting session is largely representative of most such sessions I attended.

> *Today, I have been allowed to sit in on a session with four experienced songwriters, the Norwegians C and JH, the American D and London girl L, none of whom knew each other previously. After initial introductions and hesitant attempts to 'get the feel of each other', a discussion begins about what kind of song they will write. They talk a bit about the leads they have been given.*[112] *The producer, D, plays some tracks he already has lying around and he is not very concerned with writing to specific orders.*[113] *'Good songs find homes', he says. The others especially like two of the tracks he has brought along, and they decide to work on one. He starts playing the music and the others immediately join in and start making sounds. They hum, sing, stomp out the beat, JH plays some chord suggestions on guitar, D plays around with various synthesiser melodies and sounds. When one of the others does something they like, they exclaim 'I like that!', 'That's good' or 'Yeah! Cool!'. They latch onto and develop each other's ideas when they like something. It doesn't take long for a concept or theme for what the song is to be about to crystallise, along with melodic structures that are intended to form specific parts of the song. The lyrics are developed during the process, driven by top-liner L, but in continuous interaction with the other songwriters and their input and assessments. The atmosphere is great, and wisecracks and funny comments come fast and furious.*

In this session, the participants are quick to join in and *do* something – make sounds with their bodies and machines, build and combine the different parts of the song in a fairly hectic and active phase characterised by rhythmic bodily movements, singing along and enthusiastic shouts. Gradually, the collaboration becomes more programmatic and technical, with recordings of vocals and instruments where the same phrases are repeated over and

112 A 'lead' is an order for a song sent by a record company and a production company that are looking for a specific type of song for a specific singer.

113 A 'track' is an incipient song structure, often consisting of a single programmed beat and harmonies/chords.

over again with small adjustments. For long periods, the producer works on programming details, the mix and effects, while the others listen from the sofa and/or look over the producer's shoulder, making approving comments or suggesting corrections. While participants listen through the song under way, the atmosphere in the room is revived, and participants dance, sing along and make loud approving exclamations.

Given that I have personal experience both of writing pop songs and of conducting fieldwork at such sessions, I was not particularly surprised about how these sessions played out. I was somewhat surprised, however, about what I encountered at Teatergruppa's first work sessions. Through my preparatory research, I had understood that they were concerned with being experimental and with challenging established conventions about what a theatrical production is, and that improvisation played a major role in their work. At our introductory meeting, we also talked about the fact that, this time, they were interested in dance, ritual and naivety, and that they wanted to explore spontaneity and unpredictability. I therefore expected their work methods to involve spending a lot of time on the rehearsal floor, in movement, testing bodily expressions and possibilities. What I actually witnessed was relatively far removed from that, however:

> *I enter the premises after lunch. Teatergruppa has already been working since morning. They sit in what seem to be their usual places around an oval table beside a window. A is participating via Skype from the Scandinavian city where he lives. They are talking about texts they have written as 'homework' assigned by the dramaturg C. About what kind of production they want to create, what the aim is. They read aloud from other texts they find inspiring. F is particularly inspired by the introduction to Gilles Deleuze's book on Spinoza's philosophy. '[W]e always start from the middle of things', he reads, 'thought has no beginning, just an outside to which it is connected'.*[114] *They talk about the naive, about throwing yourself into something without thinking – 'Nothing else can compare with that!'. About how dancing is a way of achieving release that empties your head of all thoughts, making time stop, making you 'experience your body in the room in a different way'. F reminisces about an experience in India where he danced all night to acid house music after taking LSD and about how he could feel free and get away from himself, but that it is never possible to experience the same situation again. They talk about the ability to create a feeling of fellowship by moving together with other bodies – to create a new, modern ritual.*

Although they were clearly concerned with using the body in different ways and with throwing themselves into things without thinking, these preparatory

114 Deleuze 1988, p. i.

sessions were primarily an *intellectual* exercise, during which they thought, read and discussed their way to the next stage, and where demanding philosophers like Deleuze and Spinoza were sources of inspiration.

It emerged that more physical, out-on-the-floor activity was planned further along in Teatergruppa's work process. Their own premises are relatively small and are not ideal for escapades involving a lot of physical movement, so they rented other, larger premises to work in. There, they could express themselves – dancing while undressing, walking in stylised fashion wearing plateau shoes, clowns' noses and wigs, but with no clothes on, improvising water slides on the floor, all mixed in with everyday movements, their own and others' texts – and accompanied by different soundtracks, often by John Cage, under F's direction. In between these dance sessions, they discussed among themselves (I even became involved in a discussion with F at one point) about how they could avoid the different sequences they created, and that they liked being given a particular form or dramaturgy. To what extent would they succeed in achieving the improvisation and unpredictability they were aiming for, so that it was not given that one element would come after another, but that the production would confound both their own and others' expectations, and that the structure would not be fixed, but could be changed? 'That dramaturgy is really exciting, I think', said So. F suggested that, instead, the piece could perhaps be an *event*, a *happening* in which different elements come together and something would happen – something that was not planned, but that could unfold spontaneously.

Leads and mappings – building versus dwelling

The way the work process unfolded in the two cases can be related to the different time frames they operated within. Whereas Teatergruppa had six months at their disposal, the songwriters largely worked on the principle of one day, one song. The songwriters and the theatre group also took different approaches regarding finding out what kind of song or performance they would create: What was it they were embarking on a creative journey *towards*? For the songwriters, it was mostly about deciding which *lead* they would use in their songwriting. The *leads* that record companies and production companies distribute usually contain references to a desired style and genre, and to similar songs and artists. They thereby constitute an order that gives songwriters a clear direction for their writing process. In addition to the lead, the song format is often relatively clearly defined in advance: the song should preferably be a little over three minutes long, with a relatively standard structure consisting of different parts such as verse, chorus and bridge. The writing sessions therefore usually started with a quick group discussion

and clarification of what kind of song they would write that day, before they started combining the sound elements that would take them to their goal.

The theatre group's creative processes had a completely different focus. Although the goal was a production that would be performed before an audience, they had done little in advance to define what the production would look like, apart from a relatively vague idea that they wanted to explore their work processes. To begin with, they had worked individually on finding (and writing) texts, thoughts and references they wanted to include in working on the production and that they presented to the others around the table. They referred to this process as 'to map something to give form to'. For them, this mapping involved 'venturing into areas where we don't have control'. Finding slots and cracks that 'open up a direction' that can 'open another space'. They were very concerned with not closing these windows of opportunity and deciding on something too early, but instead continuing to explore opportunities, moments and openings that arose. As Sa put it: 'Once the die is cast, that's it.' To 'do mappings' is therefore not about mapping an existing terrain to find a way through it, but about bringing different elements into contact with each other and seeing what can arise at the points of contact between them. During the process, the landscape will begin taking shape, eventually ending up in a concrete production.

'Writing using leads' and 'doing mappings' represent two approaches to how elements can be combined to form specific expressions, and these two work methods are more or less taken for granted by the respective groups of practitioners. Their approaches thereby seem to be what anthropologists refer to as *native categories* – classifications people use to identify and explain things so fundamental that people know intuitively what they mean, and therefore do not have to define them. Moreover, the two work processes are also reminiscent of what Berkaak refers to as *linear* versus *collateral* processes.[115] In linear processes, actors who are involved work in a targeted fashion towards pre-defined ends, as when professional songwriters write using leads, hoping to come up with a hit song. A collateral process, on the other hand, is characterised by participants letting themselves be led (or seduced) by what arises at the points of contact between the different actors, and by factors involved.

In line with Tim Ingold's distinction between a building perspective and a dwelling perspective, it seems that Campen songwriters are largely concerned with *building*, whereas Teatergruppa's members are concerned with *dwelling*.[116] In a building perspective, the production process is largely aimed at a

115 Berkaak 2016, p. 69.
116 Ingold 2011, p. 10.

pre-defined, finished product, whereas in a dwelling perspective, the creative process itself leads the way. The quality assessments conducted for various elements during the process thus reflect what kind of process the production employs. Songwriters will assess a vocal line, a lyrical element and a synth sound according to whether they contribute to the imagined endpoint – do they contribute to *building* the song they envisage ultimately creating? The theatre group's members give themselves more leeway to *dwell in* and explore the moments that arise when they bring elements and ideas into contact with each other. Although they are aware that, eventually, the process will result in a production, they assess different elements more on the basis of what possibilities different combinations of elements give rise to.

Into the unknown – or a bit out of left field

> *I ask director F to tell me a bit about what kind of production they are thinking of this autumn. He says they are still very much in the starting blocks, but that they want to make something about themselves this time, exploring how they work and the processes they undergo. They have recently met with an external dramaturg, who remarked she thought they were 'really good at getting themselves lost'. F liked the idea and has provisionally titled the piece 'A Manual on How to Get Lost'. He reads aloud from the English-language pitch for the production they recently presented to the country's leading alternative theatre scene: 'The urge to make a performance about ourselves is a manoeuvre to get away from ourselves. […] To be lost is to be fully present.' F laughs. 'I'm not sure I even understand that myself!'*

To F, the experience of getting yourself lost along the way is at the very core of what the experimental theatre group he is artistic director for does, is good at and wants to explore. This perspective can in many ways be seen as representative of how the so-called serious arts scene likes to link the quality of artistic products to their ability to challenge existing conventions, to venture into unknown creative territory and to do things no one has done before. 'Art's job is to challenge, and therein lies its quality,' as Håkon Austbø recently wrote in an essay on quality in musical performances.[117] Perhaps it is not very surprising that one can almost get lost even when describing one's own rambling creative process.

F is clearly enthusiastic about the fact that he almost cannot understand *the language* he himself uses to describe what they plan to create. The same

117 Austbø 2015 (my translation).

was the case when, in introductory sessions, he read aloud to the others from one of the texts of the philosopher Deleuze. The reason for his fascination seemed to be that he did not understand much of what Deleuze wrote, but that he liked its sound. The impression I got was that it was the poetic or phonetic aspect, rather than the text's semantic content, that was inspiring and exhilarating. It seemed to be precisely the act of reading or hearing something they could not quite grasp that enabled them to 'empty their heads of thoughts' and to enter the realm of the naive and unpredictable.

At one of their first work sessions on the rehearsal floor, performers started talking about how watching theatre, just as in being a human being, is about giving meaning to what you see. What lies behind it? What will you find if you go deeper? What do these words, these movements signify? In line with ideas from postdramatic theatre, however, the point for Teatergruppa was to endeavour to give audiences, or participants, experiences not about understanding, but about *doing* something with them.[118] The goal had to be that every time the audience was about to arrive at an interpretation and to give meaning to what transpired on stage, performers would do something that broke with the audience's expectations and ongoing production of meaning. What was conveyed was not supposed to represent anything, but to initiate something in the viewer and take her into the realms of possibility that Teatergruppa itself explored. In a way, therefore, their fundamental ambition was to move *beyond the referential*, leading to a continued reluctance among Teatergruppa's members to nail down a structure for the performance.

The songwriters were not at all concerned with entering the realm of the unknown or of the non-referential. They were much more concerned with coming up with new songs that 'people could understand' and that they could sing along with or dance to more or less immediately. For example, songwriters were extremely concerned with setting *the hook* as soon as possible – a hook being a vocal or melodic line or phrase that easily 'sticks in people's minds'. When, during one session, songwriter C expressed his enthusiasm for the song they were writing by exclaiming 'It's universal!', he indicated that it was something that could speak to everybody. Nevertheless, they clearly had to bring something *new* to the song. Really good songs, those that have quality, result from the ability to move 'a bit out of left field'. When project manager R gave his welcome speech to excited first-timers at the national songwriting camp, he did not just say that the songs they wrote had to have a broad appeal to become hits. He also emphasised how the song the record companies choose as the first single is often 'that slightly strange song', the one standing out as a bit different from what they were originally looking for.

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118 Lehmann 2006.

Unlike theatrical performers, who try to prevent the audience from making sense of what they see, songwriters thereby seem to a greater extent to want to put words or sounds to what people think or feel, but cannot always manage to describe themselves. When songwriters give listeners new references by which to understand their surroundings and experiences, one might say that they are trying to help people *make sense* of things. Whereas the quality of the artistic expression for theatrical performers is related to whether the performance is capable of challenging the audience and getting them to reflect, songwriters to a greater extent see the quality of a song as lying in its ability to resonate with listeners and to get them to identify with it. Quality assessments will therefore be made according to whether what one is making is intended to *provide* audiences with meaning or to *deprive* them of it.

Creative combinations

Although the songwriters and the theatrical group took different approaches to their work in creating their artistic expressions, for both groups the process consisted of combining elements of different types. For each element to be included in the artistic expression towards which they were moving, participants had to assess whether they regarded this particular element as good enough in itself and whether it fit with other elements they were in the process of combining. In both undertakings, various *references* to other existing expressions played an important role in the process. The different leads songwriters used in their writing were already full of references to types of artists, songs, topics and genres, and, initially, they would listen to or watch videos of some of these songs or artists to remind themselves where in the pop landscape they should position themselves.

Similarly, Teatergruppa's members constantly shared texts, images, dance videos and references to other productions by hanging things on the walls of the group's premises or by reading aloud, telling the others about them or presenting them at creative brainstorming sessions around the worktable. One of their most important tools throughout the process was a closed Facebook group where all the group's members could post ideas, thoughts, images, video links, self-composed texts, reports and videos from work sessions. In both groups, there were continuous discussions about *how* to deal with different references. Where could they take elements from, and how could they use and combine them in new ways? For example, seeing the theatrical performers spontaneously trying to copy Gene Kelly's dance moves while watching a video on YouTube was surprisingly moving and entertaining, particularly because this dancing effort came close on the heels of a thoughtful and experimental reading of the participants' own texts. A retro

1980s drum sound was brought into the songwriting process, but its relevance did not become apparent to songwriters until it was combined with a contemporary pitch-manipulated vocal. An important part of assessments conducted during the process was thus related not just to the quality of individual elements as such, but also to how well these elements *fit with* others, and what combining them *led to*.

With each assessment that led to a choice being made, and that thereby resulted in new elements being added to those already combined, the final creative expression, *the product*, began to materialise more clearly and seemed to have its own effect on the process. The significance of the emerging product was perhaps particularly apparent among songwriters at Campen, who gradually started to talk about what was best for the song and what the song needed. When, during a writing session, they reached the point where they planned to record a demo vocal of the song, several songwriters tried their hand as vocalists before the producer, W, finally ran off to ask top-liner C, who was participating in another session, whether she could sing on their song. The idea songwriters had of what the vocal should sound like on this song thereby governed the creative choice made. Songwriters were also extremely concerned with closing the writing process with a product good enough to deliver by the deadline. If they were unsuccessful in that, the process would largely have been a waste of time.

For theatrical performers, on the other hand, it was almost painful to have to nail down any part of the production. For them, it was important that the exploratory process they were engaged in would not be completed by the production's première, but that the performance was a *continuation* of the process. This principle gradually came to govern much of their work and their assessments of that work. How could they use elements they came up with, and which they liked, in ways not pre-defined but that spontaneously seemed to be most fitting? Performers were aware that it was a demanding exercise to constantly challenge what they knew and venture into uncharted waters. C, for example, described how she tried to give herself over to 'whatever', but that it could be difficult because she was the dramaturg, after all. The theatre group found themselves in a conflict between, on the one hand, the desire to keep the process going into the performance itself, while on the other, having to establish some kind of framework for what would happen at a given time and place. They dealt with this conflict by working on the relationship between text, movement and sound as a kind of fundamental principle, with the aim of always having the possibility of confounding their own and the audience's expectations. In order to achieve this, they developed a number of personal and shared 'vocabularies' – simple choreographies, small series of events and 'études' – that constituted principles, sequences or 'hooks' to hang things on when they felt the need spontaneously, or in a

specific scene. Thereby, what happened in interaction between them during the performance would help them to avoid excessively controlling what materialised, and would help make something surprising happen.

In addition, participants did not always agree about what was good or bad, and what did or did not fit in. These processes thus became a kind of ongoing *negotiation* about quality. Here, it was not just participants' personal references or positions in relation to each other that mattered; these negotiations were also about assessing how to deal with external and structural factors. What, for example, could increase the chances of a song making money in a specific music market or of the production being staged at a prestigious international drama festival? The many quality assessments conducted by participants during the process were thereby made according to different types of considerations that could often apply simultaneously.

Flow and stagnation

In both work processes, an important task for actors involved was to contribute ideas and propose elements they could bring into what was being created. What the research participants described as good idea-generating processes were also largely recognisable to me as an observer. Songwriters liked to say songs 'wrote themselves'. By this they meant that many ideas were generated in a short period of time, and that these ideas were well received by other participants, who found it easy to elaborate on them. Similarly, it was apparent when members of Teatergruppa judged improvisation sessions out on the rehearsal floor to be good. Different elements were easily included and intertwined, transitions between them worked well, and those on the rehearsal floor responded to F's instructions and suggestions from the sidelines in ways that had him laughing out loud with enthusiasm. Such processes are often described as *flowing* well – those involved experience that they are in *flow*. The concept of 'flow' is well known from research on creativity. It is perhaps especially associated with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's conceptualisation of flow as a condition where the person involved becomes completely immersed in what she is doing, so extraneous matters no longer play any great role.[119]

In work processes I observed, those involved clearly experienced the feeling of being in flow as personally satisfying; in such situations, they expressed joy and enthusiasm, engagement and eagerness, through smiles and laughter, compliments and spontaneous outbursts such as 'I love it!', 'That was bloody good!', 'Whoo!', and 'That really works!'. This enthusiasm found particular

119 Csikszentmihalyi 1990.

resonance in bodies in intense activity, some bent over in enthusiastic concentration, while three group members on the rehearsal floor coordinated combinations of advanced dance steps, or in songwriters singing with their eyes closed, their hands in the air and a smile on their mouths, while their whole bodies rocked in time to the others' movements and the song's rhythm. However, flow was not discussed as being primarily related to their own personal experience. To a larger extent, flow was something that was considered to arise in *interaction* between those involved – 'being in flow' was a phrase used to describe good interaction processes between participants. It is thus more about how ideas and input, movements, words and sounds flow *between* creative actors. Being in flow was definitely seen as a positive condition, a good thing to be part of. But it was also clear that such good flow processes were seen as contributing to generating good ideas, which, in turn, influenced the artistic end product.

The ability to maintain the flow was also regarded as an important quality for those involved to have. Several more experienced participants at Campen were assigned roles as mentors. In that capacity, they circulated among the songwriting sessions, tracking progress of the writing process. One of the teams I sat in on consisted of several relatively inexperienced songwriters who, as the evening progressed, found that their songwriting process ground to a halt after they had tried several different directions. When I left them around midnight, they had essentially given up. They sat in one of the sofas out in the lounge trying to come up with lyrics for a melody they were very unsure they would keep. When I returned the next morning, the song had acquired a new, *catchy* chorus with a slow, contemporary beat. During the day, I talked to top-liner J, who was also one of the mentors at Campen. He told me he had happened to pass the group on the sofa shortly after I had left, and had asked if they needed help. The songwriters had accepted his offer with relief, and he accompanied them back into the studio, where they managed to work up a new chorus together. According to both J and several of the other songwriters I talked to afterwards, the problem had been that the team was uncertain about how they should relate to each other. They previously did not know each other, so it was difficult to know what ideas to push hard, how the others would react to input on what they were doing and what kinds of things the others liked and were good at. No one took the initiative, therefore, to push the process in a specific direction, and a potentially productive interaction was replaced by hesitant inputs that lacked a clear recipient.

According to J and several mentors, the ability to keep the flow going is crucial for a songwriter. It is both about *taking* space, that is, coming up with your own ideas, and about *giving* space, helping others to come up with good ideas. When songwriters do not know the others they will work with, it is especially challenging to create a setting where other songwriters involved

give space to and take space from each other in ways that get the good ideas flowing and the good songs to materialise. Failure to contribute input was not appreciated, nor was saying 'no' to everything. It was a matter of striking a balance between bringing ideas to the table and making sure the best ones were included in the further process. The focus on creating flow as a collective task indicates how being a good creative practitioner in such a setting is largely about *social* competence, about the ability to get people to interact well.

In Teatergruppa, the importance of keeping the flow going is reflected in several of the group's approaches. First, these theatrical performers are not just well trained in improvisation, but are also a theatre group explicitly concerned with improvisation as a tool and performative element. Participants therefore worked hard to keep the process going during improvisation sessions. Although something they came up with did not work well spontaneously, they did not go out of character or abandon the situation, but tried something different, a variation, a different direction, perhaps something completely new. F would often give them feedback or instructions, which they tried to follow as best they could. These processes were often kept going until they essentially died out of themselves and no longer generated new elements or moments that drove the process forward. Simultaneously, as I have mentioned, it was important for them to keep the work process open and to continue their exploration for as long as possible, and not to decide too early what the production would be about. This insistence on keeping the process open could give rise to friction on the occasions when dramaturg C was present, since she could become frustrated about the group not wanting to decide on anything or nail anything down. The theatre group was more concerned with 'seeing where the process takes us', that is, where they would end up if they gave themselves over to the flow and let it take control.

For both the songwriters and the theatrical performers, the ability to produce a creative flow was a decisive aspect of being a good *practitioner*. In addition to the *craftsmanship* required to assess which individual elements should be brought into the creative process, the importance of competence of a more *social* nature is emphasised – the ability to draw on each other in ways that generate good ideas and associations. It therefore seems that the quality of the actual *process* is not just seen as important in terms of whether one arrives at a good outcome; a good work process can also have value *in itself*.

Flow mode – bodily affects

Although participants in both cases emphasised the importance of flow in the work process, they kept switching between *flow mode* and what can be defined as more of an *analytical mode*. After the theatre group had been out on the

rehearsal floor a while, it was usually time for a discussion about what had just transpired between the actors on the floor. What movements and interactions had worked? What did they like? What could they do more, and what was not so important? Which elements would they include as the process continued? Similarly, the songwriters liked to follow up a period of improvisation with discussions about which sound elements they did or did not like, and which elements they might include in the song.

In many ways, these two modes also represent two ways of assessing the quality of what is being created. In flow mode, there is little room for reflection and discussion – assessments made are more immediate and of a bodily nature. What is it that produces bodily and emotional reactions in those involved? What creates joy, enthusiasm and perhaps even discomfort? Are they moved, swept away, confused? Does it get their feet tapping, their voices singing, or get their bodies to slide to the edge of their seats in expectation? It was largely the elements that made participants react in this way that were regarded as good, and that were retained in the further process. The idea seems to be that if something can get them to react in this way, it will have the same effect on potential listeners or viewers.

The emphasis songwriters and theatre performers place on bodily reactions finds resonance in how the aesthetic quality of artistic expressions is often linked to *affect*, that is, their ability to touch the audience and provide them with an emotional experience. The anthropologist Victor Turner links the concept of aesthetics to the relationship between (human) established *experience* and new *experiences*.[120] Specific *experiences* are what confound expectations and thereby result in emotional reactions of one kind or another, and that give rise to an acute need to understand or *give meaning to* what is experienced. According to Turner, aesthetics is precisely the process through which the person who experiences something new by using her senses manages to merge this new experience with her already existing *experience*.

Analytical mode – effects in the field

When participants entered a more analytical mode, they often discussed whether and how the different expressive elements they produced could affect listeners and audiences. For participants at Campen, this discussion could be about whether they had a strong enough *hook*, whether choices of sound they had made were 'fresh' enough, or whether the chorus was uplifting enough to engage listeners. For Teatergruppa, the most important thing

120 Turner 1986.

was that the production should be able to give the audience a new experience, that what they experienced should challenge them. Could they get people to participate in the dance they performed? Could the audience's reactions during the performance influence how it played out? Was the Gene Kelly dance too ordinary or did it work as a distorted copy of the original? To what extent could they reuse costumes, characters and movements from previous productions in new expectation-confounding performances?

These assessments were also linked to considerations of a more pragmatic nature. For songwriters, for example, writing a song that can appeal to a broad audience is undoubtedly related to the possibility of financial reward. The express goal for any songwriter is to write a *hit* – a song with broad commercial appeal that can generate substantial earnings for the copyright holder. Their assessment of other people's reactions to what they write therefore also involves whether the song will resonate with the representative of the publisher they have signed with, or with the record company that produced the lead they are using in their writing. They try to envisage which artists could perform the song, and in what kinds of films or TV series it would be suitable. They also consider which markets, or territories, to aim for. Several songwriters at Campen concentrated mostly on writing song material for the Asian – and especially the South Korean – market, since potential earnings from physical sales of CDs and DVDs are better there. A song played at the end of the Nordic part of Campen was more than five minutes long, thereby breaking with the traditional pop format of just over three minutes. It was laughingly explained that, in South Korea, songs that lasted that long count as two songs and can therefore generate more earnings. This means that, during the writing process, songwriters always have to keep in mind potential *recipients* of the song, for example the artist they are writing for, an imagined audience, a given music market or representatives of a publisher or record company who have contacts required to place the song.

For Teatergruppa, it was also important to consider the expectations, rules and structural factors that apply in their surroundings. To be able to stage the production, they had to pitch it, both at an early stage of the process and during it, to local, national and international theatre venues and festivals, in ways that could optimise their chances of being included in their programmes. They had to consider what rehearsal premises they had access to, and at what price, and they applied for funding from public grant schemes to secure the livelihood of Teatergruppa and its members. A discussion about whether the production should be in Norwegian or English was decided by the argument that English would mean that it could also be staged abroad. Teatergruppa was not particularly concerned with earnings as such. At one point, they even considered not selling tickets at all, depending instead on people dropping in from the street by chance. Whether the theatre venue

where the production would be staged would accept this approach was soon dismissed as irrelevant. The importance of credibility and of their reputation in theatrical circles was raised a few times, though quality assessments of this kind were not something they were particularly concerned with or worried about. They had relatively good experience with critics, and found they were usually understood and assessed fairly and objectively.

One crucial aspect of the creative work processes both at Campen and in Teatergruppa was thus that they did not focus only on what kind of artistic expression they created. They assessed the quality of this expression according to its potential to produce different *affects* and *effects* in other actors and in broader contexts 'in the outside world'. Some decisions were made more on an *emotional* basis: What is it that *feels* good and thereby could also potentially feel good for others? Other decisions were taken on the basis of more *rational* assessments: What is the most *logical* thing to do given the ethos and conditions prevailing in the cultural landscape that this creative product is envisaged as becoming part of? In line with Berkaak's conceptualisation of artistic quality as the *agency*, or power to affect, of a creative expression, that is, what it *does*, we can thereby argue that quality assessments in creative work processes are largely about assessing what types of *influences* the product has the potential to create.[121] The quality assessments are thus not just about personal views of what has artistic value, but are inextricably linked to the actors' experience of and knowledge of what is deemed to be of good quality in the creative fields or art worlds in which they operate.[122]

Enjoying each other's company

For both types of actors, being engaged in creative production was ultimately about feeling good. The best work processes were those where they enjoyed being *together with* co-workers. Professional songwriters often find themselves in sessions where they must work with people they have never met before, and their social skills must be 'turned up to eleven'. As mentioned, the ability to make these collaborations work is one of the crucial skills a songwriter should have. Nevertheless, it was clear during Campen that some teams put together hit it off better than others. In one session I observed, all songwriters said on several occasions how much fun they were having with each other, what a great session it was and how much they would miss each other when they had to regroup. Songwriters involved did not just experience that they had made excellent music together; they had also had great fun while doing

121 Berkaak 2016, p. 76.
122 Becker 1982.

so. Several songwriters who worked together at Campen also kept in touch later and took initiatives to write songs together again. It is not at all unusual for songwriters who get along well with each other, and who find they write well together, to establish professional and personal relationships. According to the songwriters, having fun and enjoying oneself when writing together adds value to the work processes one is involved in.

The situation is somewhat different for Teatergruppa, some of whose members have worked together for more than 20 years, but even here, the interactions between the various group members are of major importance. Although, according to A, they have had their fights and disagreements over the years, they now know each other so well that they sometimes do not even have to talk to understand each other. After having spent time with Teatergruppa, I feel that its members find that what they do has quality because they do it together with people whom they like and are 'in tune with', who challenge them and help take what they are doing in directions they like. Being involved in creative activity thus also seems to contain an aspect of quality of *life* – that is, creative activity is about finding ways to have a good life together with others, about creating something good by exploring and drawing on relationships one has with co-workers.

Quality as process

The creative work process is manifested in several ways in discussions in the arts and culture field about what is good and bad, that is, about what has or does not have quality. Such manifestations are perhaps particularly present in analyses of how specific artistic expressions have been created, of what have inspired and influenced the art producer in question, and of how they were received by the arts and culture field. Retrospective stories and analyses attempt to answer the question of why it was precisely *this* product that became a hit song, a groundbreaking art installation or a timeless movie classic. However, we gain less insight into what *really* happened during the creation of this particular artistic expression.

Focusing on creative processes is relevant in several ways to our understanding and discussion of what we mean by 'quality'. Participants in both undertakings studied were clearly aware of the quality concept's presence in public discourse and public administration. They were capable of reflecting both on the problematic aspect of clearly defining the concept and on how it could be included as a strategic element when formulating their own applications for public funding. The specific term 'quality' was strikingly absent, however, in the actual work processes I observed; assessments and discussions about what choices had to be made during the process were never

about whether 'this is of good quality'. An ethnographic look at real-time quality assessments thereby gives us an opportunity to study how understandings and disagreements relating to what is good and bad play out in verbal communication, but also in actions and conduct. This is an argument, then, for the importance of moving beyond (or through) an overarching discussion of concepts and also of addressing how understandings and assessments of quality are *experienced* and, not least, *conducted*, from a 'native point of view'.[123]

Studying such quality processes provides insight into how different understandings and assessments of quality are not distinct and consistent quantities or perspectives, but instead are continuously drawn towards and collide with each other, becoming intermeshed. During the process, perceptions of commercial potential, critics' assessments and the ability to move people can overlap, conflict or exist side by side. For songwriters, for example, there is little or no conflict between commercial success and musical quality; on the contrary, the *good* songs are also those having the potential to *do* well. Several of these perceptions find resonance in established categorisations of different understandings of quality attributed to the work, such as assessments of whether its *craftsmanship* stands up to the test, whether it meets certain *criteria* and *standards*, if its *intended meaning* is relevant and interesting, to what extent it has the potential to become a product that can *sell well* or fits a specific *market*, whether it appeals to the *masses* or to a specific group of *arbiters of taste*, or to what extent it demonstrates the ability to be *topical* and *innovative*.[124] Most striking about the creative work processes I have followed, however, is that there is seldom one *paramount* consideration. Instead, different considerations are present simultaneously, becoming entangled and conflicting with each other. Approaching quality as a process means considering how creative work necessarily entails different, and at times conflicting, understandings of quality that are continually negotiated over time.

Also worth noting is that the quality process is not over when the artistic product has been completed. By being played and performed, songs and theatrical productions become enmeshed in new 'constellations (networks) of passive and active factors',[125] where they are constantly subjected to new quality assessments. The quality of a specific artistic expression is therefore also related to whether it continues its journey even after its (provisional) completion and comes into contact with new factors and actors that set in motion new chains of events. Songs recorded by artists, then sold and played,

123 Geertz 1974.
124 Eliassen 2016.
125 Berkaak 2016, p. 69 (my translation).

and theatrical productions staged and reviewed, continue their quality process even after the defined work process to create them has been completed. And, not least, we as critics, academics and public administrators are involved in these quality processes, since our views, statements and assessments help to place and move different artistic and cultural expressions in the shifting quality landscape.

Whether they unfold as individual or collective work processes, quality processes in the context of arts and cultural production are undeniably linked to questions about the division of power and influence; by dint of their positions, some people have greater opportunities than others to make things happen or to prevent things from happening. In the Norwegian context, bodies such as Arts Council Norway, and others that administer and allocate arts and culture funds, wield significant influence over what production processes actually unfold, and how. Applications for funds are rarely linked to finished products, as people apply for funding for the future production of something. Various award programmes therefore make quality assessments of *planned* processes, applying certain criteria and understandings regarding what a good process should look like and which components it should contain to result in a good artistic product. When recipients of funds are required to report afterwards on whether things have gone according to plan, one can wonder whether it is the work process (and the expression it results in) that is assessed or the ability to follow the original plan. It would be interesting, therefore, to gain further insight into how such allocation processes unfold, for example through ethnographic investigations of Arts Council Norway's various councils and committees.

In the same way as young, inexperienced songwriters at Campen gain insight into how good pop songs are written, different art education programmes provide training in how to create good artistic expressions. A good work process is thus seen as having a better chance of resulting in a good artistic product, and, as described, having a good work process is something that is rated highly by the practitioners themselves. We can therefore ask whether the way in which practitioners of art and culture *experience* their own work process has any connection to how the resulting artistic product fares. Are processes where participants *feel* good also the processes that produce artistic expressions that *do* well? Investigations conducted in this project show that ongoing quality discussions in the arts and culture field can benefit from placing more emphasis on the artistic process *itself* and from allowing *process* to play a more important role as a quality marker in assessments of artistic and creative work.

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The Emergence of the Curator in Norway: Discourse, Techniques and the Contemporary

Eivind Røssaak

… in the organization of exhibitions,
the works must not stand in the way …
Marcel Duchamp

Art exhibitions are sites of reproduction and articulation of perceptions, values and knowledge. In Norway in the 1990s a new figure emerged to challenge these articulations. It was the free art curator.

Nowadays, large-scale exhibitions are rarely mentioned without the curator being named, and few words have given rise to more buzz in the art world than the term 'curator'. Hundreds of books published since the turn of the millennium discuss the phenomenon: *Ways of Curating*, *The Curatorial*, *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, *Curating and Politics*, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Curating* and, of course, *The Curator's Handbook*. There is no shortage of suggestions about the significance, prevalence and power of the curator. A recent book summarises the current situation as a comedy about what happens when every sector wants a curator: *Curationism: How Curating Took over the Art World and Everything Else*. Who is this figure?

The word 'curator' comes from the Latin *curare* and is often used about a 'custodian'. The history of the term dates to the days of the Roman Empire, where curators were responsible for supplies and sanitary conditions; they were bureaucrats, men of the law. In the Middle Ages, the curator was part of the clergy (curate) or looked after minors and the sick – and even the insane. A procurator (someone who 'attends to something on someone's behalf') was often a solicitor or a lawyer. Using the Norwegian National Library's N-gram

reader, a quick search of books, texts and newspapers from the last 200 years shows that the word is still most often used in connection with child welfare cases and in the health service, although the term 'curator' is increasingly also used in the field of art.[126] The term has a complex history in the art and exhibition context. The curator function can be said to have existed for as long as objects have been put together and presented to a viewing public, but the first instance of the actual word 'curator' being used to refer to a connoisseur, custodian and exhibitor of a collection of objects is found in the Renaissance. Robert Hooke was one of the first known curators in this sense of the word. He was appointed 'Curator of Experiments' for the *Royal Society* in London in 1664. The curator as a custodian of collections has since had a long history in the library and museum fields. In the art field, a new type of curator emerged at the end of the 20th century, one whose duties did not include functions such as purchasing and looking after collections. The curator played a part in changing the art field internationally, and gradually also in Norway, particularly from the 1990s onwards.

New logics of exchange in the art field: Concepts and background

The purpose of this article is not to recount the history of the Norwegian curator, but to endeavour to show how the emergence of a new curator type engages in a kind of 'making' (*poièsis*) where the goal is not simply to exhibit an artist, but to demonstrate how art can participate in creating or bringing forth new knowledge.[127] Here I will focus on how this curatorial *poièsis* foregrounds the intimate connections between mediums, aesthetics and the understanding of quality, and how it intensifies the traffic between the conceptual and the visual/sensual. We can say that an exhibition can bring forth a new arrangement of concepts, ideas and sensualities. The conceptual element in this bringing forth will be in focus. It concerns how an exhibition explicitly and implicitly employs a number of concepts and ideas to bring something forth. Ensuring the clarity of this bringing-forth is largely what the curator's job consists of.

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126 My thanks go to Lars Johnsen of the Norwegian National Library, who carried out the N-gram search for me amongst digitalised Norwegian books and newspapers from the last 200 years. The search showed that, from around the year 2000, the term 'curator' was used with increasing frequency in the art context. In the 19th century, the word was often used in combinations such as 'procurator' (lawyer) and in a very few cases in connection with curators of museums. The National Library's N-gram service is available here: https://www.nb.no/sp_tjenester/beta/ngram_1/.

127 This way of understanding what exhibitions can do is inspired by Samuel Weber's discussion of *poièsis* in his essay 'Upsetting the Set-Up' in Weber 1996, pp. 55–75.

In particular, I will discuss the development of concepts and understandings of quality as they are expressed in the programmes for some selected exhibitions. In recent years, a new critical model in the discipline of art history has turned the spotlight on exhibitions and curator concepts rather than on styles, epochs and artists' production. Florence Derieux, curator at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, puts it as follows: 'It is now widely accepted that the art history of the second half of the 20th century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions.'[128] This kind of approach to Norwegian art history remains an exception. Despite all the books that have been published, all the articles written and conferences held on the topic in Norway and abroad, no one has provided a full and systematic overview of the importance of the curator in Norway. Since 2004, Bergen Academy of Art and Design has offered a postgraduate course in 'Creative Curator Practice', and has had a master's programme in the discipline since 2015. A Norwegian curators' association was founded in 2011, and it has started work on creating a Norwegian curator archive. A comprehensive review of the field is definitely necessary, but that will be much easier once all the documents and archives have found a home. This article will present an analysis derived from using a small, limited selection of material chosen to illustrate how a curator can alter our sense of quality, value and knowledge. The article tries to follow some of the steps in what could be a paradigm shift in terms of perceptions of quality. The curators in focus seem to use a critical and theoretical model to confront an old aesthetic quality paradigm (say, the modern) and replace it with a new one (say, the postmodern or the 'contemporary'). Even if the material is small, the analysis of the mechanisms of articulation and power at play in these records could be applied to other materials as well.[129]

We can conceive of three different quality areas in the curating context: the quality of the curator's catalogue text (i.e., the curator's approach and interpretation), the quality of the presentation form (i.e., how the curator uses the gallery space, the location, information and educational tools – this is often referred to as 'the curatorial' by critics), and the quality of the works

128 Derieux 2007, p. 8.

129 Within such a postmodern or contemporary paradigm it has become a common practice to also include exhibitions that address issues or groups excluded by the old aesthetic paradigm. This could include exhibitions that focus on ignored or unrecognised groups, such as female artists (the feminist critique) or alternative art histories that challenge ethno-nationalism (the postcolonial critique). However, these are not included here. Moreover, a broader take on the curator in Norway needs to include a host of other Norwegian biennials and distinctive projects such as *Skulpturlandskap Nordland* (Sculpture Landscape Nordland), as well, but the scope of this article does not permit this. Nonetheless, the discursive approach laid out in this article could most likely also be applied to these other exhibition concepts in useful ways.

included in the exhibition. Usually, when we talk about quality in the art field, we mean quality in the latter sense, the quality of the works of art. However, the experience of quality is probably the result of a combination of these three quality areas (text, exhibition, works) and, in the wider sense, part of the conversation about art (art reviews and opinions). Furthermore, the experience of quality constituted by these elements is, as we will see, also a matter of power or what could be called the discourse on quality in Norway at a certain stage in history. A more comprehensive study of the emergence of the curator in Norway should compare all these areas (catalogue texts, exhibition models, the selection of works and participants, and art criticism) to really get to the bottom of it. That is not possible within the limits of this article. Here, I have chosen to focus on an often overlooked aspect of work on exhibitions, namely catalogue texts. This aspect is also particularly relevant in this context, since it is in these texts that the curator most clearly sets out his or her view of quality – and at times, attacks and formulates what is going on in the discourse of quality. I try to identify these discourses as a field of art qualities in conflict. I also make the assumption that it is precisely the new significance context and discourse have in relation to understanding artworks during the period in question, the 1990s, that makes the catalogue text (and thereby the curator) such a convenient case study. The turn to discourse theory in the art field also seems to coincide with the emphasis on very knowledgeable catalogue texts and curators with a clear voice.

We can envisage three curator types in the 1990s that were in dialogical opposition to each other: the museum curators, the artist curators and the free curators. A brief clarification of concepts is necessary here: the museum curator is not an unambiguous figure or role. Historically, this role has been divided between directors, custodians and experts. Today, large museums usually have several curators. The curator's role will also differ between different art museums. Here, we can distinguish between central and regional museums, museums built around one artist (for example the Munch Museum) or centred on a certain medium (e.g., specialist museums for photography, video art, printmaking, etc.). In this article, I see the typical art museum curator primarily as an art historian who is permanently employed at a central institution, such as the National Museum. Of course, the role of art museum curator is an 'old' role, influenced by the complex internal history of the institutions concerned and by a number of important personalities throughout history. A great deal has been written about how Henie Onstad Kunstsenter has played an important role in this area in Norway, also long before the term 'curator' became common parlance.[130]

130 See especially O'Donnell 2016.

The artist curator, that is, an artist who curates her own and/or others' works, became a prominent figure in the 1990s, especially as a result of the flourishing of new, artist-run exhibition venues. They have played a major role throughout the history of modern art, but one much-discussed phenomenon that should be mentioned particularly in this context is the explosive growth of artist-run galleries in Norway in the 1990s. These exhibition spaces were often started because groups of artists, usually younger artists, felt overlooked by the traditional institutions. Many artist-run exhibition venues were therefore established in opposition to traditional museum curators. In some contexts, even the term 'curator' was disavowed, because it was too strongly associated with the traditional institutions. They talked instead about self-organised shows created collectively by a group of artists. These exhibition spaces are discussed elsewhere, and will therefore not be a focus here.[131] There is no doubt, however, that alternative galleries of this kind helped to create an opposing voice to that of the traditional institutions, which, in turn, was picked up on by a new type of curator, namely the free curator. This type of curator is not affiliated with a certain institution, and is not primarily an artist, but rather an academic with a wide-ranging background. Such curator figures are particularly interesting in relation to the type of investigation presented here, since free curators often emphasise the discursive to a greater extent than others do, as well as the important mediating role of the catalogue text – and they often reflect more explicitly on 'the curatorial'.

'The curatorial' is a term that has popped up in many debates about what it means to curate something in the art field. The curatorial is a category that embraces all aspects of an exhibition – as well as the thoughts and ideas the curator wishes to convey to society. To study this phenomenon, it is necessary to look at all the elements that make up an exhibition – not least 'the ideas' that are tested. A good catalogue text can say something about how the curator envisages 'the curatorial' aspect of a specific exhibition. The curatorial is about the connection, both material and in terms of ideas, between the catalogue text, the exhibition and the works of art, and, as Irit Rogoff points out, it entails a deeper form of critique of knowledge that self-reflectively raises questions about the different parts of the art exhibition: What is a catalogue text? What is an exhibition? What is a work? The curatorial explores 'the possibility of thinking how we can know from a different perspective'.[132] Thus, it is intimately linked to *poièsis* as a creation of change to alter the souls

131 See Veiteberg 2017 for an interesting review of this phenomenon in Norway in the 1990s.

132 Rogoff cited in Schwartz 2016, p. 97. While the term 'curatorial' is used by many critics to refer to the presentation of an exhibition in general, Rogoff's and my understanding of it deepens the term to encompass the ways an exhibition questions *and* brings forth perceptions, articulations and modes of knowing.

of the participants or audiences. It establishes an 'active production space', a space that is physical, mental, intellectual and institution-critical, and that foregrounds art and concepts of quality in new ways.[133] Art and its modes of presentation become part of a deeper questioning of viewpoints, habits, and knowledge. We can say that the curatorial borrows energy from the art field, as the art field has borrowed energy from the discursive and philosophical (in the form of institution-critical art, conceptual art and so on). The relationship between exhibition venue, artworks, artists, critics, art historians and other fields of knowledge, such as philosophy, is part of a new logic of exchange that was less common before the emergence of the type of curator who emerged in the 1990s.

Dissatisfaction with traditional, handed-down concepts of quality and the flourishing of new experimental art practices from the 1960s onwards played a decisive role in the emergence of the new curator. This emergence gave rise to a crisis in the art field that became increasingly pronounced, also in Norway. We could say that this crisis and the eradication of unambiguous hierarchies in competing art practices are among the most important factors internal to art for the emergence of the curator. We see this clearly in the best-known curators' self-reflections and catalogue texts and in interviews with them. Painting has been the central artistic medium throughout the history of modern art, despite a number of attempts by the avant-garde to dethrone it. This hierarchy broke down in the 1960s, however. Seth Siegelaub, one of the pioneers of curating, believes that the changes became especially apparent from 1967 onwards; painting as the master medium was pushed aside by multimedia forms of expression, such as installations, which do not have a natural 'fixed place' in the museum or gallery space in the same way that paintings do. The form of presentation became a problem in itself, and thereby the modern curator was born, Siegelaub argues. We need someone 'to make someone else aware that an artist had done anything at all'.[134] It therefore became common for curators to collaborate closely with artists who represented completely new, unfamiliar and unknown artistic practices. For example, Siegelaub cooperated closely with the artist Joseph Kosuth, and Szeemann collaborated closely with artists such as Joseph Beuys.

Both art and the role of the artist were changing drastically. The art historian Boris Groys makes the polemical claim that, with the emergence of installation art in the 1960s, the artist became the curator of his own work.[135]

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133 Ibid. Charlotte Præstegaard Schwartz launches the term 'active production space' to foreground a dynamic conception of space at play in certain curatorial practices. Her term was inspired by Doreen Massey and Irit Rogoff.

134 Siegelaub 2000, p. 49.

135 Groys 2008.

A function arose here that some traditional museums and galleries did not feel comfortable with. The work of art was somehow not quite complete when it left the studio, as a painting had been; an installation was not finally 'complete' until it was given its correct form of presentation in a gallery or museum. A function thus arose, a curator impulse, that was first in evidence among artists, but that was later developed in cooperation with a new figure who specialised in this kind of mediation of art between the artist, gallery and viewing public.

Art is always mediated in the form of a number of paratexts. The artist, title, year, provenance and other metadata that surround the artworks in an exhibition are examples of such paratexts. The new curator invests even more in this paratextual mediation in the form of presentations, interpretations, theoretical contextualisations and explanations of the relevance of the works. The curator gradually became the person in the art field who knew the new art best. Towards the turn of the millennium, the artist and curator Liam Gillick found that it was no longer art historians and critics people read in order to understand what was happening in the art world, but the curators' catalogue texts.[136] Historically, museum curators have always been doctors and professors of art history, at least on the Continent. They were often specialists who were very knowledgeable in a selected field, often a historical era or style. The new curators tended to have a more wide-ranging background, and some of them had already managed to take a doctorate in contemporary art. They represented an opposing voice in relation to the traditional knowledge hegemony. Art historian Gunnar Danbolt writes about how the traditional art historians simply failed to keep up, lost their grip on contemporary art and were challenged by curators and artists who were well-versed in theory.

> Forty to fifty years ago, art theory, at least here in Norway, was a specialised discipline that art historians normally steered well clear of. Art theory belonged to the realm of philosophy and was regarded as a discipline where people engaged in meaningless discussions with no practical relevance to art history. This perception was largely due to the fact that the concept of art was fairly fixed and therefore did not concern art critics or historians. As soon as postmodern art reached Norway, however, the situation changed.[137]

When things are no longer fixed, but are in a state of flux, the curator becomes a catalyst. Art education changed as well. As the 1990s progressed, the education offered by the art academies moved in a more theoretical

136 Gillick and Bos 2005, p. 74.
137 Danbolt 2014, pp. 14–15.

direction with the introduction of aesthetic theory. This turn to theory put the students in a better position to see art, the artist's role and the new techniques as an open and heterogeneous field of critical possibilities. In particular, it helped to lay the foundation for the artist being able to also function as a curator in a new way. The 1990s thus became the Golden Age of artist-run galleries in Norway.

The exhibition as a medium

In several of his books on curating, Hans Ulrich Obrist has shown that there are many actors in art history who can be said to have played a central role in developing the idea of the exhibition as a creative medium in itself. There are many pioneers, from the custodians of Renaissance cabinets of curiosities to artists like Courbet and Manet, who organised their own protest or counter-exhibitions in their own exhibition venues. New exhibition models were often created in opposition to or as critiques of established institutions. In Norway, the inauguration of the artist-run National Art Exhibition in 1884 marked a break with the academies' classical style, and pointed towards a new naturalism in art. However, it was the artistic avant-garde in Europe that was responsible for what was perhaps the most important innovation in the exhibition medium in the 20th century. Several of the schools within the avant-garde were created and consolidated through group exhibition projects outside the established institutions. Some museum directors, for example Alexander Dorner, should nonetheless be mentioned. The collaboration between Dorner and the artist László Moholy-Nagy in the 1930s is striking. Their sketch for the exhibition *Raum der Gegenwart* ('Contemporary Room') combines film, architecture and design in an advanced multimedia concept. Dorner had already developed exciting ideas around the so-called *Stimmungsräume* ('atmosphere rooms'), a concept that did not become widespread until much later. Others should also be mentioned in this connection, such as the museum directors Alfred Barr (MoMA), Willem Sandberg (Stedelijk Museum), Walter Hopps (Pasadena Museum of Art) and Pontus Hultén (Moderna Museet in Stockholm) – and the influential freelance curator and critic Lucy Lippard. In the Norwegian context, Per Hovdenakk and Ole Henrik Moe were audacious curators long before the term 'curator' circulated in its present sense. But what interests me in this context is not primarily the big institution builders in the art museum field, but rather the new, free curator voices that emerged in Norway in the 1990s. They often adopted an opposing position to the big, weighty institutions and 'spoke' on behalf of new expressions and trends that had yet to be canonised. A well-known 'father figure' for oppositional curator voices of this type is the Swiss Harald

Szeemann (1933–2005). Before we take a closer look at the Norwegian examples, it is therefore important to look at one of those who shaped the free curator role.

Harald Szeemann specialised precisely in the new, unconventional techniques and hybrids associated with installation art, conceptual art and performance. Exhibitions are 'poems in space', he believed, and his curating of *documenta 5* in 1972 set the standard for curating contemporary art for a long time to come.[138] Szeemann's charismatic and, at times, authoritarian curatorial practice has also given rise to many myths about the curator. He loved being photographed as a man who erected walls and installations like an artist, and he dreamed of new exhibition models derived from 'structured chaos' and designed as *Gesamtkunstverk* that would be capable of giving the viewing public a revolutionary shaking-up and undreamed of sensory impression.

Szeemann started the first-known independent curating company after he was controversially fired as director of Kunsthalle Bern in 1969. The curating company went under the name 'The Factory' and 'Agency for intellectual guest work' (*Agentur für geistige Gastarbeit*). The Agency's first exhibition, *Our world of things – objects*, was actually shown at both Kunsthalle Nürnberg and Høvikodden Kunstsenter in 1970, the latter co-curated by Ole Henrik Moe.[139] Taking Duchamp and Warhol as its points of departure, the exhibition explored the dividing line between art (*readymades*) and everyday objects. Szeemann rarely referred to himself as a 'curator', however, but alternated between the titles 'Ausstellungsmacher' (exhibition maker), 'meta-artist', 'inventor' and even 'shaman'. The designation 'Ausstellungsmacher' is interesting because it has links to an anti-bourgeois tradition dating back to Bertolt Brecht. Instead of using the correct 'bourgeois' terms such as 'author', 'curator', 'instructor' or 'director', 'progressive' artists preferred terms that included the German suffix '-macher' (e.g., shoemaker in English). Brecht did not call himself an author, but 'Stückeschreiber' (writer of plays), and he was called 'Stückemacher' (play maker) or 'Theatermacher' (theatre maker).[140] In other words, Szeemann's use of this term helps to demystify the museum director and the museum as an elevated and distant institution. Instead, it encourages a kind of participatory model where the curator is also a carpenter and craftsman.

We can say that Szeemann's curating is characterised by three tendencies that were typical of the times and that would also come to have great

138 Szeemann cited from Birnbaum, 2005. The review of Szeemann's work is based on Obrist 2008 and 2014; Gardner and Green 2016; Birnbaum 2005 and Platzker (undated).
139 The exhibition is discussed in O'Donnell 2016.
140 I thank Christian Janss for clarifying these terms.

significance for the free curators in Norway: *anti-art*, *anti-museum* and (to a lesser extent) *a-historical soundings*. 'Anti-museum' refers to an activist criticism of traditional museums as reactionary mausoleums where art goes to die. Instead, museums should be living places where things happen, and where people learn to think in terms that are also relevant to their own time. Among other things, this trend is reflected in the interest in criticism of institutions and in artists' alternative museum concepts. Several such strategies were tested at *documenta 5*. For example, Szeemann allowed a number of artists to participate with projects, archives or exhibitions they had curated themselves and that could be read as pastiches of museums, or anti-museums. Throughout the exhibition period, Joseph Beuys carried out a performance in the form of an *Agency for organising direct democracy through referendums*. Marcel Duchamp took part with *Boîte-en-valise*, a mini-museum in a suitcase, Claes Oldenburg with *Mouse Museum* (a series of Mickey Mouse figures), Herbert Distel with *Museums of Drawers* (500 artists' works catalogued in drawers), Marcel Broodthaers with *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (a fictive and parodic museum featuring more than 500 objects), and Ben Vautier with *Cupboard, which* contained an archive of Fluxus actions.

The anti-museum tendency is closely related to the anti-art tendency. 'Anti-art' was a general term that was widely used in the 1960s and 1970s, often about the avant-garde schools of art such as Dadaism and Conceptualism that Szeemann helped to promote in Europe. His practice was thus in sharp contrast to the dominating Clement Greenberg-inspired painterly modernism, which criticised the new so-called theatrical events and installations in art. It was precisely such speculative and theatrical tendencies in the art field that Szeemann allied himself with. For example, his exhibition *Wenn Attitüden Form werden: Werke – Konzepte – Vorgänge – Situationen – Information* (better known as: *When Attitude Becomes Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information*) at Kunsthalle Bern in 1969, reproduced in one-to-one format in Venice in 2013, was a fierce attack on the dominant abstract modernist painting that had dominated *documenta 4* in 1968. Szeemann invited 69 artists to present art in new ways: Richard Long went on a long journey in the mountains, Mario Merz made an igloo, Michael Heizer 'opened' a pavement, and so on. The reactions to the exhibition led to Szeemann eventually having to resign from his leading position at Kunsthalle Bern.

'A-historical soundings or resonances' are a feature of Szeemann's art philosophy, and it was also the title of an exhibition he organised at Stedelijk Museum in 1988 ('a-Historische klanken'), at which art from different eras was mixed together to produce various kinds of harmonies. This technique is not very common in Norway, but it crops up in comparative elements in

some exhibitions.[141] Szeemann used many different variations of this method during his career. Sometimes, art was displayed together with non-art (utility objects and popular-culture products). Such displays were a central feature of *documenta 5*, which was titled 'Befragung der Realität – Bildwelten heute' ('Questioning Reality – Pictorial Worlds Today'). It was not Art with a capital A that was examined, but rather the relationship between reality, art and pictures in a more general sense. Art was seen in a broader pictorial context related to visual culture and iconology. Art objects were shown together with kitsch, utility objects and ritual objects from the past and present. This entailed anthropologising the concept of art and opening the door to visual culture long before this became *comme il faut* in academia. The critic Georg Jappe wrote: 'For the first time, *documenta* is not a judgement day, establishing world ratings, but a value-free, thematic exhibition.'[142] Szeemann suggested that the exhibition should be 'a place for programmed events, as spaces of interaction, as a walk-through event structure with shifting centres of activity'.[143] He thus set the standard for turning mega-exhibitions into, as he called it, 'the Hundred-Day Event'. For examples, Joseph Beuys did a Hundred-Day action, and Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Michael Asher, and Franz Erhard Walther participated with casual, process-oriented and open-ended works which changed form throughout the exhibition. The boundaries between art works were at times blurred. For example, Daniel Buren was allowed to do a striped posters work that infiltrated many other works – to many of the other artists' frustration. While Szeemann's previous exhibition, 'When Attitude Becomes Form' – which tended towards conceptual art, happenings, Fluxus and post-minimalism – had an air of 'the artists taking over the institution', *documenta 5* was very much an example of 'an exhibition taking over the art works'.[144] The 222 participating artists were placed in five thematic sections that were curated by Szeemann's assistants, a method that others have since been inspired by.

Another important element of Szeemann's work that proved crucial to the emergence of the curator in Norway was the administrative organisation of *documenta 5*. Szeemann was the first free curator to be chosen to lead what was the most important art exhibition in Europe. He used the freedom the appointment gave him to make a number of major structural changes that were so radical that curators have had to fight to keep them on several

141 An interesting example of historical harmonies is the exhibition *Seeable/Sayable*, curated by Ida Kierulf, Helga-Marie Nordby and Eivind Hofstad Evjemo at Kunstnernes Hus in 2016.
142 Quoted from Gardner and Green 2016, p. 23.
143 Szeemann quoted from Gardner and Green 2016, p. 21.
144 This topic is discussed more fully in Gardner and Green 2016, p. 21.

occasions afterwards.[145] Whereas previous *documenta* 'secretaries' had been faithful servants of the exhibition's bureaucracy, Szeemann established a new curator-controlled model that entailed changing both how artists were selected and how the exhibition was administered. The first thing he did was to abolish the traditional advisory recommendation committees and their voting system. Secondly, he appointed a working group of co-curators chaired by himself. Absolute control via a centrally controlled curator model led to greater freedom to conduct audacious experiments and make controversial choices, he claimed.

A controversial aspect that provoked many of the participating artists was that the art works were referred to as 'individual mythologies'. Szeemann thereby circumvented the artists' and critics' own concepts and conceptions, thereby laying the ground for what he saw as a freer and more open approach. However, the approach could easily be taken to mean that the artworks were primarily regarded as precisely 'personal visions' (even as private myths or religions) and not as critical practices or appropriations, or assessed on the basis of their independent social and political contexts. Important artists such as Robert Smithson, Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Robert Morris and Fred Sandbeck chose to withdraw from the exhibition in protest. Some of their critical essay contributions were nonetheless included in the exhibition catalogue.

Szeemann extended Seth Siegelaub's idea of the curator as publisher. The exhibition catalogue was a thick tome that more than anything else resembled a report from a multi-faceted research project. In design terms, it marked a clear shift away from the beautiful art catalogue towards complex documentation of an exhibition. Szeemann was not the type to shy away from conflicts and arguments, which is perhaps why his exhibition catalogue also included essays by artists hostile to his mode of curating *documenta*. Robert Smithson's essay 'Cultural Confinement' criticises Szeemann for being like a prison warden who positioned artists like chess pieces across the white cube. 'Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits', writes Smithson.[146] Daniel Buren's now classic essay 'Exhibition of an Exhibition' is also included in the catalogue. Buren writes: 'More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art'.[147] Another group of prominent artists from Judd to Haacke

145 In her catalogue text for *documenta 10*, curator Catherine David mentions that she had to repeat Szeemann's revolution because the exhibition administration had re-established the old divisions and hierarchies that he had endeavoured to crush in 1972 (see David, 1997).
146 Quoted from Gardner and Green 2016, p. 25.
147 Buren 2010, p. 211.

and Smithson wrote a declaration of artists' independence aimed directly at Szeemann in *Artforum* in 1972. They proposed a number of rules that a curator must not break: '1. It is the right of the artist to determine whether his art will be exhibited …, [and] what and where … 2. A work of art should not be exhibited in a classification without the artist's consent. 3. An artist must have the right to do what he wants without censorship in the space allotted in the catalogue'.[148] While some artists disliked Szeemann's direction and saw it as interference, others, such as the artists Joseph Beuys, Bruce Naumann and Richard Serra, found his direction liberating and innovative. Controversies about the curator's role, like those in Szeemann's day, have a tendency to resurface every time a new, strong curator appears on the scene. Such controversies also arose in Norway, as we shall see in the next section.

Art + philosophy = curator

Twenty-five years after Szeemann's first assignments as a curator, the debate about the curator started in earnest in Norway as well. The art scene in the 1990s was dynamic and brimming with conflicts. There was internal disagreement in the Norwegian Association of Visual Artists (NBK), the Young Artists Association (UKS) demanded more power, and alternative artist-run exhibition venues cropped up in several places. The Museum of Contemporary Art failed to live up to expectations that it would highlight young Norwegian artists, the first 'UKS biennial' curated by independent curators was held, some artists (particularly those who were overlooked) protested against the curator's role, and some sections of the institution-based cultural elite did not like the curator having such a high profile.

A debate erupted in the newspaper *Aftenposten* in 1996. Some of it was like an echo of the controversies swirling around Szeemann. Among other things, Karin Hellandsjø, the then head conservator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, made statements suggesting that the curator had acquired a too prominent position, and that curators put philosophy, theory and their own concepts and ideas ahead of the art.[149] During this period (from 1988 to 1999), Åsmund Thorkildsen was director of Kunstnernes Hus and, in many people's view, a leading exponent of a new, informed and theoretical way of playing with exhibition concepts. He answered Hellandsjø in the now legendary article 'Art + philosophy = curator' in *Aftenposten* on 11 November 1996. In the article, Hellandsjø and others are described as representatives of a cultural elite that is hostile to theory and that takes cover

148 Quoted from Gardner and Green 2016, p. 25.
149 See Hellandsjø 1996a and 1996b.

behind an artificial distinction between contemporary art and philosophy. Thorkildsen claimed that what contemporary art wants, and perhaps even demands, is a more philosophically oriented reception and presentation. The year before, the leading art historian Arthur C. Danto had given his *Mellon Lectures on the Fine Arts*, later published as *After the End of Art*, in which he argued that art and philosophy were closer to each other than ever before. Traditional conceptions of art are completely passé, Danto maintained, and Thorkildsen argued that a curator for contemporary art had to acknowledge this. Hellandsjø responded rhetorically by stating that a curator is not meant to *add* meaning to art, but to 'extract the meaning and help the art to express itself'.[150] Many people took part in the debate, arguing for and against, or taking an intermediate position. We will let this debate lie here and scrutinise what was actually happening on the curator front. In practice, the curator in Norway did not seem to have stood in front of the art waving a philosophical finger, but rather to have collaborated with artists in an attempt to show how art itself 'thinks'.

Thorkildsen spent the last few years of his time at Kunstnernes Hus experimenting with what he himself called postmodern exhibition models, which played with the visual possibilities offered by the gallery space, combined with catalogue texts that were often rich in perspectives and educational elements for visitors and students.[151] Some examples: In an exhibition of posthumous works from the studio of the late Per Palle Storm in 1995, white plaster sculptures were placed in a room that had been painted turquoise, like swimming baths, while the room next door was red. In several exhibitions, Thorkildsen cooperated closely with the artists on rearranging the exhibition spaces. The influential conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, who had taken part in *documenta 5*, was invited to experiment with his own text-based installations, for example. A room that had been painted black was filled from floor to ceiling with texts in white type from art history and the history of philosophy. Since there was great interest in Kosuth at the Norwegian National Academy of Fine Arts, students were invited to attend academic get-togethers in the room, and the distinction between art and philosophy was problematised in practice.

In connection with the exhibition *Slab of Skinned Water, Cubed Chicken & White Sauce* from 1997, Thorkildsen invited Jessica Stockholder to further develop her site-specific installations. Together with students from the National Academy of Fine Arts, she transformed Kunstnernes Hus into a gigantic, deconstructed architectural installation. The walls of the (art)

150 Hellandsjø 1996b.
151 Evensen (undated).

institution were literally shaken. Stockholder's operations in the rooms were effective in the same way as cinematic special effects: objects obstructed and penetrated walls and formed visual passages that resonated with painterly, photographic and digital manipulations. The rooms combined rough craftsmanship, work and process in a fine-tuned manner.

Since the art scene in Norway was in many ways out of sync with that of the rest of the world, it is not easy to compare Norwegian curation during this period with what international curators were doing. For example, both the trends that Szeemann fought against and the trends he advocated were still not dominant in Norway in the same way as in Germany. Curators like Thorkildsen therefore faced a formidable educational task, and polemical attacks (for example on modernistic painting) were never as important as they were on the Continent. Thorkildsen's work as a curator was largely devoted to introducing central, but often ignored, American contemporary artists to Norway, and to what we could call the problematisation of painting and photography in the 1980s. The high curatorial quality of his exhibitions undoubtedly helped to open up the landscape to new input and, not least, to inspire young curators to find new ways of working with Norwegian contemporary art.

The contemporary

Several critics and art historians have subsequently claimed that the period in the 1990s that came after the postmodern period can be called 'the contemporary'. The term covers a number of tendencies, including relational art, post-conceptual art, context art and social art. These tendencies cannot be assessed using medium-specific understandings of quality that take form, colour, style and proportions as their point of departure. Instead, we got art that 'to a greater extent examines and explores the world and different aspects and modes of reality', wrote Øystein Ustvedt in *Ny norsk kunst etter 1990* (New Norwegian Art after 1900), and he pointed out that 'art's scope is expanding and touching on other disciplines, such as research, critical journalism and archive-like strategies'.[152] In his monograph *Frå modernisme til det kontemporære: Tendensar i norsk samtidskunst etter 1990* (From Modernism to the Contemporary: Trends in Contemporary Art after 1900), Gunnar Danbolt maintains that the most important characteristic of the contemporary is that we no longer regard art as an object, but more as a process, a creative action or a performative statement.[153] The viewer therefore has to

152 Ustvedt 2012, p. 7.
153 Danbolt 2014.

relate to art in a different way than before – in a more active and participatory manner. Discourses, the social aspect and art's peripheral zones must be incorporated into the experience as part of the art, rather than being regarded as irrelevant, as being extraneous to it.

In the 1990s, however, the contemporary was not always given a hearty welcome by the established art scene in Norway. The traditional institutions (Museum of Contemporary Art), the organisations (NBK) and the prevailing view of art were not contemporary enough, young artists believed. They did not believe that the educational institutions were moving in the right direction either. Minister of Education and Research Gudmund Hernes even interfered in the National Academy of Fine Arts' internal affairs and, against the will of the students and staff, supported Rector Jan Åke Petterson when he advertised two professorships in 'figurative art'. Several members of staff protested vociferously against this suppression of academic freedom, and Professor Ingrid Book and Associate Professor Carina Hedén resigned their posts at the academy in 1996.[154] The conflicts and debates in the art world were fierce, and it became quite clear that this was a struggle between the old and the new, the contemporary. New artistic practices therefore made their strongest mark on the alternative art scene, where they were often mediated by a new type of curator who was not permanently affiliated to an institution and who was willing to formulate his or her ideas.

An interesting parallel shift was also seen in the journal *UKS – Forum for samtidskunst*. From the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s, this journal was edited by George Morgenstern and Stian Grøgaard. Not unlike Åsmund Thorkildsen, they gave Norway's art scene an education in international aesthetic theory. They took a particularly strong interest in Kantian and post-Kantian aesthetics up until Lyotard's theories of aesthetics or the postmodern sublime, but it was largely American, not Norwegian, contemporary art that was highlighted. In 1996, there was a dramatic shift in the journal's profile. The new editor, Bjørn Bjarre, calls it a 'break'. His first editorial had the heading 'off/on'.[155] Now, the so-called off scene in Norwegian contemporary art was to be 'switched on' and have a well-deserved spotlight turned on it. The whole first edition was devoted to the alternative art scene in Norway, and – appropriately enough – Ingvill Henmo, co-curator of the 'UKS biennial', reported over four pages from a panel debate on the biennial.[156]

154 Book et al. 1995.
155 Bjarre 1996.
156 Henmo 1996b.

Discourses and hierarchies of mediums

Three exhibitions in particular exemplify the new curator's emergence in Norway: The 'UKS Biennial' in 1996 at Stenersen Museum in Oslo (curated by Jon-Ove Steihaug and Ingvill Henmo, probably among the first Norwegian free curators to explicitly embrace the new curator concept), *Fellessentralen* at Kunstnernes Hus in 1998 (curated by Jon-Ove Steihaug) and the national exhibition *Kunst til folket* in 2003–2004, which travelled through several cities (curated by Jonas Ekeberg). These exhibitions propounded a new type of understanding of quality that represents a break in Norwegian contemporary art. They turned away from some of the criteria and debates that prevailed in modernism and in parts of postmodernism's concept of the sublime, and towards a new understanding of art. In the following, I will scrutinise some key formulations and curatorial aspects regarding these exhibitions.

How did the new understandings of quality manifest themselves? The three exhibitions and their curators put new understandings of quality on the agenda. They adhered to the notion of exhibition making as part of a *poièsis* and the *curatorial* in Rogoff's sense. Art, aesthetics and politics were calibrated in a new way. New concepts, new generations and new mediums were foregrounded to alter how we think about and value art. More specifically, the curators' understanding of quality broke with the old hierarchy of mediums and opened the door to a discursive approach. They wanted to show 'the other art' that the national institutions had 'overlooked'. There was a clear shift of focus from the two exhibitions in the 1990s, which established the concept of discourse and argued against the old hierarchy of mediums, to the *Kunst til folket* exhibition in the 2000s, which took for granted the break with the old hierarchy of mediums and the discursive approach. Below, I will discuss each of these approaches.

The 'UKS Biennial' in 1996 was the result of a desire on UKS's part to depart from a typical jury-based spring exhibition of submitted, jury-evaluated works in different mediums and using different techniques. If jury-based exhibitions are grounded in mediums and representativeness, curator-based exhibitions are more often grounded in ideas and concepts, and are subject to stronger direction, as Szeemann very clearly demonstrated. One key context for the start-up of the 'UKS Biennial' was the break with the old hierarchy of mediums. In his time, Szeemann also had to break with the hierarchy of mediums that had dominated the *documenta* exhibitions. In Norway, however, despite many avant-garde attacks during the 20th century, the old hierarchy was even more deeply entrenched, since it was so fundamental to the relatively well-organised Norwegian art scene. The artists' union and collectivist models of organising and thinking stood very strong. According to UKS and the younger artists, NBK perpetuated

an outmoded view of art linked to the old hierarchy of mediums, and this way of organising things dominated the art scene, the museums, some of the art criticism and several of the big exhibitions.

Traditionally, work shown at exhibitions was often selected by a jury that used NBK's categorisation into techniques. This categorisation was used to organise the members, the annual autumn exhibitions, the museum's different sections, juries and grant committees. The techniques were painting, sculpture, printmaking, drawing, textiles and the open category 'other techniques'. The first types of mediums – painting, sculpture and printmaking, in that order – were regarded as the real and most defining artistic mediums. As we have seen, however, the emergence of 'other techniques' was closely linked to the emergence of the curator in Europe in the 1960s. The same happened in Norway in the 1990s. The underrated category 'other techniques' gradually became so dominant, especially among young artists, that the hierarchy of mediums lost its legitimacy. This was evident at the UKS Biennial in 1996, and it was emphatically underlined by the new head of UKS, Bo Krister Wallström, who, that same year, advocated smashing NBK's techniques regime and introducing external curators at both the annual autumn and spring exhibitions.[157] That a new understanding of quality that is not derived from the old hierarchy of mediums was emerging was very evident in the catalogue for the UKS Biennial, and, as we will see, it was precisely therefore that the concept of discourse became so important. The expressive and formal criteria that had helped to define quality in painting and sculpture were no longer valid or meaningful in the same way as before when faced with expressions that had previously been assigned to what gradually became the anachronistic category 'other techniques', which includes film, photography, video, installation art, performance and various forms of appropriation.

In their respective texts in the catalogue, Steihaug and Henmo introduce a new paradigm for understanding quality. Henmo compares curators 'with editors of an anthology' who place art in a 'field of meaning' and clear the path for 'the production of meaning in the broadest sense'. The exhibition catalogue is 'part of the exhibition context'; it offers 'a special reading'. She clearly sees the curator as someone who is expected to formulate new understandings of quality, and proposes an approach where the modernistic expressive painterly paradigm is replaced by a discourse-oriented paradigm. I will tease out how these two paradigms frame the understanding of quality differently.

I need to explain the concept of 'discourse' in more depth here. On one level it is an implicit methodology used in this article to understand how power, counter-power and power of definition were established in the art

157 Wallström 1996.

field in the 1990s. At the same time, I am in dialogue with how the curators use the term, and thirdly, it appears as something called the 'discursive turn within the arts', which seems to combine the ongoing awareness of matters of discourse among both artists and curators at the time. However, the concept of discourse is problematic because, on the one hand, it is a precise methodological concept associated in particular with Michel Foucault's theories on truth and power, while, on the other, it is used more generally about 'conversations' about a phenomenon. What is often forgotten in the latter use of the term is that 'conversations' about a phenomenon are perceived as legitimate or illegitimate according to different institutional and historical modes of situatedness. It is the latter point that is developed in Foucault's theories.

For Foucault, 'discourse' is a new term for 'context'. It is used to denote a broader social and political context relating to the power of institutions. What power mechanisms exist and how do they define both cultural and scientific ways of perceiving and understanding? The power of language and of definition become important: How is the power of definition established? Who exercises this power to define phenomena such as quality, beauty, right and wrong, etc.? Foucault defines 'discourse' as a control and power mechanism that ensures that high quality and deep layers of meaning are attributed to certain techniques and expressions, while other expressions are branded as meaningless and failures. 'Discourses are the result of the homogenising procedures for ordering, organising and control to which a given contemporary statement is subjected at all times.'[158] We can say that all areas of society, including the aesthetic field, for example Norway's art scene, develop such 'homogenising procedures'. Here, therefore, we will concern ourselves with a specific art discourse that can be called 'the quality discourse' in Norway's art scene in the 1990s. How can we detect its footprint or influence on the art scene? It is difficult and requires shrewdness, imagination and hard work. The curators often use studies of documents (from institutions, trade unions and the media), conversations with artists, and analyses of exhibitions and works in order to identify what power and quality discourses are taking place. We could say, for example, that the old hierarchy of mediums in the art field is maintained by institutions, trade unions and a nostalgic generation of art critics, and that these actors, deliberately or unconsciously, form 'a homogenising procedure for ordering' art and quality. Young artists like Ole Jørgen Næss deliberately played with such procedures in their theatrical exploration of different artist personalities and techniques, which brought to light specific quality discourses. In methodical terms, we also need to be able to keep several discourses in our minds simultaneously, because what happened in the 1990s

158 Eliassen 2016, p. 53.

was that most young artists wanted to oppose a modernistic quality discourse (the type that denied that social discourses were relevant to aesthetics) in order to replace it with a postmodern quality discourse in which it is envisaged that art itself can conceptually incorporate, play with and expose other social discourses.[159] It is this process that is often referred to as the discursive turn in contemporary art. Young artists and curators envisaged being able to uncover power discourses in society by intervening in or mimicking them.[160]

In discourse theory terms, it can be claimed that, in the 1990s, the free curator attempted to expose a run-down definition of hegemony in an art field that was controlled by unwieldy institutions and trade unions. But we can also assert the opposite, that, through their attempts to establish new understandings of art, the curators helped to establish a new hegemony that confronted the old model of understanding. In that connection, we can talk about 'quality discourses in conflict', but this manner of speaking is methodologically problematic in itself. In Foucault's terms, it is always about power. The leading discourse has power; the counter-discourses go unnoticed (are considered to be a kind of madness) before possibly breaking through and establishing a new power. The 1990s was probably the period in the Norwegian art scene during which a new discourse broke through, and this breakthrough therefore also forms a paradigm shift or power shift. The emergence of the curator in Norway thus coincides with the breakthrough of a theoretical turn (the discourse paradigm) and new tendency among young art to go beyond the hierarchy of mediums. The three new phenomena that emerge during the 1990s (the new curators, the discourse paradigm, and the young artists' farewell to the hierarchies of mediums) constitute a new understanding of quality. The fact that we are studying a breakthrough that the curators and artists are in the midst of means that the curator's strategies become both experimental and performative; the curator's self-imposed role is to claim that something new has happened, before he or she can really claim with any certainty that it has. As is known, Foucault preferred to have

159 Here, it is important to clarify the use of certain terms in the Norwegian context, because the Norwegian art field used the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' in many different ways, and modernism was attacked from different camps, so to speak. In some contexts, the anachronistic Odd Nerdrum school was referred to as postmodern in its contempt for modernistic aesthetics, but that labelling is incorrect if we understand postmodern aesthetics to be discursive and theory-oriented, which the Nerdrum school was not; their aesthetic was more pre-modernistic or simply 'kitsch', as Nerdrum himself maintained. In some contexts, we also see that serious actors within both modernistic and postmodern aesthetics had a shared interest in philosophical or theoretical aspects of contemporary art (in opposition, for example, to the champions of 'figurative' art), which was reflected in the debates and controversies about the National Academy of Fine Arts in the 1990s.

160 The discursive turn in art was influenced by Foucault's theories, but it is not necessarily coherent with all aspects of Foucault's own theories. This article does not address this problem.

about a 200-year distance from a phenomenon before he could carry out reliable and thorough discourse analyses. That is a liberty that was not an option for curators in the 1990s – nor is it an option for the author. We are therefore interventionists rather than researchers in Foucault's sense. We make claims that are probable, but not necessarily incontrovertible.

When examining texts written by curators in the 1990s, we often see that the curators follow an interventionist agenda whereby they seek to replace one understanding of quality with another. They present two quality discourses as being in opposition. This is undoubtedly the strategy adopted by Henmo in her catalogue text for the UKS Biennial in 1996. It is interesting to see how Henmo solves the big problem in discourse theory: How do we identify a discourse? She believes that art can itself bring to light the discourse it is fighting against. As Henmo uses the term 'discourse', it appears to be about the fact that the artistic *practice* itself must be thought of as an event that consciously brings discourses to light, and that this process itself becomes both a quality criterion and new way of understanding how art is organised. We ask: What does art want to achieve? For example, Vibeke Tandberg took part with 'Valentina', a series of computer-manipulated photographs, where she digitally inserted herself into images of the crew on one of NASA's expeditions to the moon. Moreover, the American flag has been replaced by a Russian flag. These substitutions and insertions were not primarily made to highlight beautiful forms and colours, but to highlight space travel as a gendered and nationalistic discourse.

If modernistic painting failed to make clear that it belonged in a specific social and political discourse, we can say that the new art of the 1990s consciously sought out the discursive element in its own practice and expression. This kind of perception of discourse also entails that art must be understood as a practice that intervenes in a socially constructed field. For Henmo, the new artworks, 'the other art', do not place themselves in relation to a painting discourse internal to art, as the modernists did, but in relation to an external social and political discourse that concerns a number of public issues. It thus intervenes in a social field, Henmo believes. She discusses Mary Kelly's concept of the 'painterly trace'. The expressive 'trace' points *back to* an artistic subjectivity. Henmo tries to do the opposite by showing how new artistic strategies intervene in or *point out towards* a social practice, and she refers to Anders Tomren, who works with mass-produced objects, to Per Odd Bakke, who appropriates the language of newspaper adverts, and to Eva Kun's acrylic reliefs, which are without any trace of subjective gesture.

Henmo suggests 'regarding art as language' – a socially constructed language (not the formalistic language of linguists). Like a language, art can intervene in 'foreign languages' by visual objects being moved from one sphere to another. It is about the traffic of words and things from one context to another.

This contextual way of understanding art is typical of the curators of the 1990s, who saw a contextual sensitivity at play in art itself. Quality is here liberated from a formalistic, modernistic quality model linked to the expressive touch, and pushed towards a more open discursive understanding model linked to the social, image archives and the conceptual. Artistic methods or utterances do not index or point back to an expressive subjectivity or body, but to something that is socially constructed. The composition and content of the picture thus do not primarily express a feeling or subjective expression, but instead highlight the use of images in the culture, for example how media images implicitly advocate a certain view of gender roles, race and identity constructions relating to fashion and pressure to buy. When the politics of these images is revealed in this way, the quality criteria are also changed from a discourse internal to art (the painterly trace) to a discourse extraneous to art (the rhetoric of images in the public domain). The quality discourse changes completely; here, artistic quality is manifested through an indexical connection to social and political practice. Art establishes itself in *the public domain* in a new and more direct way, Henmo argues. She transforms Foucault's discourse theory into a kind of activistic strategy that is used by the artists themselves. It does seem rather confusing, however, that she suddenly uses the term 'aesthetics' instead of 'discourse', but her point appears to be that 'aesthetics', or rather 'choice of style', has now become a discursive phenomenon in itself that can be borrowed, moved or (mis)used.

> By making use of aesthetics and visual quotes from areas other than art (art history), the artists become directly involved in the public domain. In light of this, being concerned with aesthetics, style or execution is based on something completely different from good or bad taste. By using aesthetics [as a discursive style choice], the work of art is infiltrated into a [potentially new] context, and the choice of aesthetics is a way of placing the work of art in a context that is not necessarily within the bounds of art as an institution. Infiltrating codes is a way of playing on the public's expectations, and it can also be a way of reaching an audience that does not have any relationship to 'art'.[161]

At the end of the quoted passage, Henmo anticipates a possible objection to this kind of discursive (not 'fine') art, namely that it is elitist and does not concern the general public, by saying that it is actually about what ordinary people are subjected to, and that it can therefore also reach people who believed that art did not concern them. This inversion of the concept of art and the understanding of quality is thus about how the artist chooses a

161 Henmo 1996a, p. 22.

technique or style (here: aesthetic) not according to a modernistic model where the medium itself is subjected to examination (as proclaimed by the critic Clement Greenberg), but based on a discursive model where the choices of technique, medium and style are used strategically and must be quality assessed on the basis of how effectively the result intervenes in a rhetorical and political context.

This intervention practice is also exemplified by a reference to Martha Rosler's 'appropriation art': art intervenes or points beyond the art field by appropriating materials, styles and media techniques that are not taught at the academies, but in different industries, such as advertising. Anti-aesthetics, or appropriated aesthetics, breaks with and breaks down a traditional quality-based aesthetic grounded in form, colour and composition. In one and the same movement, art's new way of commenting on the social and political breaks out of art while simultaneously pointing ahead to a new type of understanding of quality in art. Henmo writes: 'By using mediums other than traditional art mediums/materials, the social contexts to which the mediums/materials belong are drawn into the work.'

We could say that while Harald Szeemann provoked by equating 'individual mythologies' and 'a-historical soundings' from throughout art history, Henmo wishes to highlight how a new generation of artists are establishing a new (discursive) aesthetics through specific practices, which at the same time means that our understanding of the connection between art and quality must change. Quality no longer lies in 'the touch', but in the force by which a discourse is evoked.

The peripheral zone and the alternative art scene

At the next big exhibition of young Norwegian contemporary art, *Fellessentralen*, the discursive aesthetics was further embellished and the curator's role thematised directly in relation to the idea of an alternative art scene one wished to showcase and speak about. Self-reflection and peripheral zones were emphasised both in the art and in the curator's catalogue text. Steihaug's extensive preface to the exhibition catalogue set the trend for how even art historians like Gunnar Danbolt would later come to discuss art in the 1990s. Steihaug's concern was aesthetic and political. He sets out a clearly conflict-oriented model, where the curator takes a stance *against* the traditional institutions and *for* an alternative art scene. The curator becomes the voice of the alternative or the others.

Steihaug mentions four phenomena that have made their mark on the alternative art scene: a new awareness of theory in art education, the establishment of artist-run exhibition venues as counter-institutions to the

museums, an international orientation among artists and, last but not least, the debate about NBK and the curator's role. The exhibition medium is also expanded by linking it to the theatre, the cinema, libraries and salons. *Fellessentralen* consists of five parts: 1) the artists' works, 2) a documentation library, 3) a room (called 'the new scene') for invited projects (theatre, dance, performance, lectures, discussions and – not least – artist-run exhibition venues), 4) a Norwegian video art programme curated by Kristin Bergaust called 'Video videre' (Video going forward), and 5) the catalogue, which, typographically, plays with a number of paratextual displacements. The five parts form an active production space that points both backwards (what has been happening on 'the new art scene'?) and forwards (where is art heading?).

The term 'the new scene' was important in Norway at the time. *Fellessentralen* collaborated actively with Galleri GI, Kunstinnsikt, Galleri m. balkong, Baktruppen, Origami-nettverket and G.U.N. The idea that 'another scene' and 'another art' exist outside the established, institutional, canonised, interpreted and understood art became a major driving force for several curators. The artist Elisabeth Mathisen, one of the participants in *Fellessentralen,* had curated the exhibition *Den andre kunsten* (The Other Art) at UKS in 1996, where she attempted to find what she called 'the unfinished work'. The alternative art scene in the 1990s could symbolise this 'other'. Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim were particularly active in the development of new exhibition concepts and actions. Many new exhibition venues popped up in these cities. They liked to call themselves 'self-organised' to distinguish them from their predecessors. According to Steihaug, the Norwegian freelance curator role he identifies with evolved as a result of the alternative scene, and he became a spokesperson for an attempt to understand the power and criticism this scene represented. Steihaug's expansion of the exhibition medium to include five different sub-elements was itself probably directly inspired by the new exhibition venues, which often led the way in turning away from the monomedia (paintings hanging from a hook) to the multimedia and event-like. The exhibition venue also became a social gathering place. Among other things, Otto Plonk in Bergen organised 'parties' with DJs. The DJ and the free curator emerged on Norway's art scene simultaneously. It was obvious to those involved at the time that the DJ's sampling of music resonated with the curator's sampling of art.

We need to examine Steihaug's catalogue text more closely to assess how he articulates the new situation. The curator's opposition to the traditional museum institutions is part of what Steihaug describes as the 'underlying discussion in the exhibition', that is, what the viewing public may well not notice. He explores the idea of 'the other' by focusing on what he calls outsides, peripheries, challenges and demarcations. These are artistic positions that lie outside well-established understandings of quality. They are:

> 1) artists who work across or at the *periphery* of mediums, 2) artists who conduct a dialogue with what lies *outside* the concept of art, in popular culture and elsewhere, 3) artists who adopt positions where common categories of art production and the artist's role are *challenged*, 4) cultural production that takes place outside the concept of art, but that nonetheless has a connection to it or indirectly questions the lines of *demarcation*.[162]

Rather than being artists who stay within one medium, these artists strategically position themselves *on the edge* and even *on the outside*. This positioning inevitably challenges common quality norms. It gives the curator a special responsibility, which is also problematic – since he or she must invent a quality norm for art that can also include that which is not yet art as we know it. This is where the idea of the exhibition as an active production space made its appearance. Steihaug emphasises, namely, that 'art is the collective creation of meaning'. It is something we must understand together, but this *cooperation* is not without conflicts. Several actors vie for this place and for the right meaning. 'The artist, critic, museum, curator, gallery, education system, the media, etc. together produce the meaning of the art and the concept of art.'[163] The curator therefore must create a production space that promotes thinking that is both self-reflective and self-critical. There are no neutral actors in this game. Following a brief discussion of the role of the museum conservator, Steihaug highlights the primary elements in the new curator role.

> To my mind, however, there is something significantly new about the curator concept. At best, it implies a different *self-understanding* on the part of the person creating an exhibition, relating to *postmodern* theory and artistic practice from the past 20 to 30 years. Curators have realised the importance of context and acknowledge that, in that sense, they are co-creators and part of the *collective production of meaning*. This means that they must *self-reflectively* explain their interests so that a genuine exchange of views can take place (after all, this is how all good research works). In the traditional conservator role, the conservator pretends instead to represent a neutral and objective body, an expertise that is capable of picking out '*quality*'. Of course this is also a smart *power position* to have if you want to avoid scrutiny. The conservator does not want to acknowledge that he, as conservator, participates in producing the artistic meaning that he, at the next turn, claims to only reflect.[164]

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162 Steihaug 1998, p. 17 (my emphasis).
163 Ibid. p. 17.
164 Ibid. p. 20 (my emphasis).

Postmodern theory is probably emphasised because it was a theory that attempted to conceptualise experiences that are undergoing a transition or are in a borderland between what is inside and what is outside. This is reflected in influential 'postmodern' philosophical texts such as Jacques Derrida's *Marges de la philosophie* (The Margins of Philosophy) or Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (Words and Things). Self-reflectivity, postmodern theory and the idea of collective production of meaning are emphasised as curatorial categories in contrast to traditional expertise, which hides behind the notion that expert taste is neutral and objective. When self-reflective demarcations become a collective concern, 'decorative' art (Widerberg, Weidemann, Nerdrum and Bleken are mentioned) has little to contribute, Steihaug believes. It 'moves' nothing:

> In my eyes, this is a form of reproducing and 'decorative' art that may be of 'high quality' within its own frame of reference, but that doesn't really move anything. Significant art is primarily to be found where a form of meta-reflection is taking place, where something fundamental is shaken up that changes the field or the framework as such, where the conditions for producing art are changed.[165]

What was previously regarded as high artistic quality is thereby only valid within a certain frame of reference. This does not mean that Steihaug doubts this art, but that he doubts the frame of reference that legitimises this art's concept of quality. Steihaug hunts for traces of a meta-reflective eagerness for change in the art field. He does not discuss art theories that like to claim that all art defines its own theory, that is, that all art is self-reflective at one level or another. Steihaug is searching for a special type of self-reflection that concerns peripheral zones, or that reflects on the relationship between the inside and the outside of art, in order to shift the usual lines of demarcation in the field. Steihaug shared this search with many critics and curators during this period.[166] NBK's classification system was undergoing a legitimacy crisis, according to Steihaug, because its map of contemporary art no longer reflected what young artists were interested in. NBK maintained a false and homogenising order in the art field. The 'significant' art was somewhere else.

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165 Ibid. p. 18.

166 In Røssaak 2001 and 2005, these peripheral zone strategies are discussed in depth in light of international theory and the new 'craving for reality' in the art of the 1990s.

Criticism of institutions

When Jonas Ekeberg was given responsibility for curating the National Touring Exhibitions' (Riksutstillingens) tour in 2003, the curator role became even more explicitly political. Ekeberg challenged what he called a 'social democratic order'. This order implies an educational imperative: art must be brought to the people. He called the exhibition *Kunst til folket* (Art to the People). This is Norwegian Labour Party rhetoric in a new guise, or the exclusive cycle (an alternative art scene) relaunched in the rhetoric of the inclusive cycle (as 'art to the people').

National Touring Exhibitions was going to celebrate its 50th anniversary with an exhibition of new, young art in Norway. Ekeberg emphasised a historical paradox concerning the year 2003: one of social democracy's most important art institutions, National Touring Exhibitions, was celebrating itself in the age of neoliberalism. With the help of Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern theory about the fall of the great narratives, this paradox was very evident. National Touring Exhibitions could be understood as being within the horizons of the great social democratic narrative.[167] The neoliberal mentality had lost faith in all great narratives. But what was the great social democratic narrative about in the field of art? The National Touring Gallery (later National Touring Exhibitions) was founded in 1952. It was intended to unite the people, 'open people's minds' and create a 'need for good art in town and country'. Art was to play an important part in enlightening the people. After the victory of reformism in the 1930s, the Labour Party was willing to accept the idea of a common good taste, abandoning Communism's criticism of bourgeois art and instead taking the view that workers should also like modern (bourgeois) art. Paradoxically enough, when the institution's 50th anniversary occurred, trust in the great narrative was on the wane, and modern art had become postmodern or conceptual. National Touring Exhibitions was based on the idea of spreading a uniform national culture, but had now ended up with an art scene that was no longer national, but internationally oriented, and art that did not focus on art for art's own sake, but that in its content was highly critical of the Norwegian art institution. Even the institution tasked

167 Art historian Dag Solhjell (2003) criticised *Kunst til folket*, arguing that Ekeberg interpreted National Touring Exhibitions too much as a social democratic project. Solhjell, for his part, saw National Touring Exhibitions more as a child of the old elitist and state-authorised artists' association *Bildende Kunstneres Styre*. Instead of supporting and building up artistic institutions in towns and cities outside Oslo, as the Labour Party did through the far more decentralised National Touring Theatre system, National Touring Exhibitions became an alibi for keeping all artistic activity and evaluation centralised in the capital city, Solhjell claimed. Ekeberg had become an unwitting hostage for what Solhjell called 'a national curatorial class'.

with educating and bringing art to the people had become part of what was criticised by the new art. Ekeberg recalls that, just as the neo-avant-garde in the USA destroyed the American art system in the 1960s, we now had 'a Norwegian neo-avant-garde'. In other words, there were major challenges of a political, educational and ethical nature. What did Ekeberg do?

One important discussion was about where National Touring Exhibitions was going wrong in its dissemination of contemporary art, and it was largely about the absence of a good educational framework around the exhibitions, in Ekeberg's opinion. You cannot just send new art from the younger generation out to the people and expect everyone to understand and like it; you must incorporate the experience into a broader educational setting to a much greater extent. The curating must be strong and comprehensive, and it must use a number of new methods and possibilities.

If Szeemann represents a shamanistic curator type who denies himself nothing, and Steihaug and Henmo are discursive curators who show how artworks directly or indirectly articulate 'discourses', Jonas Ekeberg goes from a 'discursive turn' to an 'educational turn' in his curating. Exhibitions as active production spaces are expanded by each of these changes. Steihaug involved a number of different actors from the art field in Norway. Ekeberg involved non-artistic actors to an even greater extent. He invited researchers, journalists and architects to participate in an attempt to give the curating an extensive boost in educational, social policy, and dissemination terms. He wanted to ensure that paradoxes, challenges and new art were understood by people. The phrase 'art to the people' is not just ironic, it is a new literal dissemination method. A large network was to take part in, comment on and carry out research on the dissemination of art to the people – while the exhibition was ongoing, and as part of the exhibition.

In addition to art, Ekeberg included a variety of art influencers and commentators such as the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's (NRK's) culture department, the newspaper *Klassekampen*, the political activist network AdBusters, the architectural firm Space Group, the motion graphics studio Racecar, and researchers on art and culture from the university colleges in Telemark and Stavanger. These seven 'non-artistic' actors were tasked with presenting other views on art and art dissemination within the framework of the 'art-to-the-people' ideology. NRK created a tailor-made greatest hits version of its *Art to the People* programmes, *Klassekampen* had a separate supplement on the topic, the university colleges presented their research on 'public art' and a historical review of National Touring Exhibitions, Space Group sketched a new gallery space, and Adbusters and Racecar experimented with alternative forms of presentation. Together, these actors contributed to an institutional and dissemination critique that was both historic and forward-looking. The catalogue clearly showed that it was

a different form of institutional critique than art itself produced. In these ways, Ekeberg showed how research and art can shed light on the same issue. Polemically speaking, the research became 'art for the people', while the art became a critique or discourse about 'art to the people'. This discursive approach to art was in the spirit of the time. Ekeberg says himself that he was inspired by Catherine David and her thoughts about curating *documenta 10*. According to Ekeberg, David toyed with the idea of creating an art exhibition without any art, just lectures and debates.[168]

Challenges

The new curator tradition from Harald Szeemann to the Norwegian curators in the 1990s and onwards has developed an active production space in Norway that has played a decisive role in changing and expanding the understanding of art. It has helped to show a way out from aspects of modernistic aesthetics, broken with the hierarchy of mediums, promoted new art practices, and made theoretical and political reflection an important part of the art scene. In addition, it has helped to highlight how the art field actually functions, using fundamentally conflict-oriented terms that are in sharp contrast to the cumbersome, consensus-oriented terms of traditional institutions.

Today, the free curator is under strong pressure because of structural changes in the art field. In conclusion, I will present some provisional speculations on this pressure, although more research is needed.

I see three major structural changes relating to new management principles, economic tendencies and technological changes. Firstly, a neoliberal mindset has made itself felt in the arts and culture field, also in Norway, a country where state aid has been a principal means of ensuring continued variation in the arts and culture. The neoliberal mentality, among other things through the *New Public Management* model, has contributed to changing the management principles for state or state-funded institutions as well. How does this mindset challenge the relevant expertise and the curator's role as critical arbiters of quality?

Secondly, cuts in allocations for the cultural sector over the national budget have forced art institutions to seek funding in the free (sponsorship) market to a greater extent. What does this lead to?

Thirdly, new digital technologies pave the way for many new challenges, and here we must speculate and try to think the unthinkable, namely that algorithms can take over the job of quality assessing and curating art. Central

168 Jonas Ekeberg in an interview with the author, June 2017.

to these challenges is an idea of administration and control. Surveys are conducted to find out what people want, and quality hierarchies are established on that basis, as though society consisted of rational actors with no cultural or political ideas or special interests that should be challenged. The curator's critical sense and insight into complex quality assessments is weakened, and bureaucrats and computers can manage most things because the notion of hierarchies of discourses is no longer considered valid.

New Public Management

New Public Management principles in the art and museum sector will probably change the internal balance of power within the institutions. Communication and marketing departments will be strengthened, and the experts and the role and autonomy of the curator will be weakened. These changes could improve the institutions' ability to communicate in market terms. Seen from a curatorial perspective, however, they will often lead to a less clear artistic profile. Paradoxically, these changes happened at the same time as the curator that emerged in the 1990s had found a place on the art scene as a fragile, but natural part of the landscape. One of my informants saw two clear consequences of the rise of New Public Management in the art world: Firstly, the curator's direction is supplemented or replaced by new communication advisers, and, secondly, the curator's autonomy is reduced as communication departments are given greater responsibility for agendas and profiles. Marketing departments tend to transform the curator's voice into a new type of 'friendly curator' who is a 'pleasant' representative for the established and inoffensive. 'Thrills' are emphasised at the expense of critical interest. It is easy for the curator to becoming embroiled in a game in which 'marketing' considerations trump artistic considerations. The education programmes for curators have professionalised the curator and given us competent curators who are ready for the international art scene, but the institutional requirement for neoliberal flexibility has led to an expectation that 'clever' curators should be able to frictionlessly defend anything whatsoever. They must be able to transform the mediocre or popular into something interesting and attention-grabbing. The curator thereby becomes a bureaucrat for hire rather than a controversial history writer with something important to say. The 'clever' curator seeks consensus rather than dissent, the established over the controversial, and the expected instead of the unexpected. Poor or weak curating also leads to a backlash against so-called curator power. People dismiss curating or reject the role of curator. We see this where artists and gallery owners circumvent the curator to let 'the artworks speak for themselves'. This attitude lacks self-reflective pragmatism, because, quite simply,

no work of art can speak for itself; there is always a context, a pretext and a paratext. All presentation of art entails an element of direction, which must be developed critically and creatively because nothing 'speaks for itself'. A good curator is always self-reflective in this area.

New Economic Structures

We see two clear tendencies in Europe – and also increasingly in Norway – that change the economic structures of the art field. State aid for museums is being challenged, and more and more museums and biennials are becoming pawns in a financial policy game where exhibition profiles come into conflict with the financial services industry's fight to gain a place in the sun through so-called innovative *branding*, which can easily lead to the curator being sidelined or put in an awkward position. The fact is that sponsors are never neutral players, but have their own story and agenda. Many artists protested, for example, when the art world giant Tate let itself be sponsored by big oil companies with dirty hands.[169] Sponsorship agreements with parties that, for example, make a fortune from supporting 'fossil fuel villains' or exploiting cheap labour lead to many ethical dilemmas for institutions and participating artists. Such dilemmas can also make the existence of art institutions fragile. A sponsor can suddenly ditch an institution, as in the case of Deutche Bank, which suddenly terminated its extensive collaboration with the Guggenheim in Berlin in 2013. Cost-intensive institutions like the Guggenheim often show a clear influence from their sponsors. Sponsors such as BMW and Armani have also influenced the exhibition profile, for example when the museum put on a retrospective fashion exhibition about Giorgio Armani in 2000. The museum also toured with a motorbike show that highlighted BMW motorbikes. What role the Italian coffee producer Lavazza played in the museum's focus on Italian futurism was also much debated.[170]

It is well known that sponsors buy themselves cultural capital, a kind of cultured worthiness, by sponsoring art and cultural institutions, but art and cultural institutions should perhaps adopt clearer ethical guidelines for such agreements than is presently the case. Such guidelines could prevent many embarrassing situations. Is it acceptable, for example, to accept funds from industries seen as unethical in some contexts or that operate in conflict with environmental policy goals? In 2012, artists' organisations in Norway united in criticising the Astrup Fearnley Museum for having signed a sponsorship agreement with Lundin Petroleum, a company that was under investigation

169 Art not oil coalition, 2016.
170 Peers 2016.

for violations of international law. In May 2017, Norwegian artists, musicians and authors issued a joint appeal in which they demanded an end to cultural institutions' accepting 'dirty oil money' sponsorships.[171] Norway is far from pure and innocent in this context.

There are also examples, however, of sponsors or figures from the financial services industry having helped museums and exhibition venues to develop in very positive and interesting directions. Reesa Greenberg has examined what she calls 'activist-patron-curators' in North America.[172] Elizabeth A. Sackler, who calls herself a 'public historian' and 'arts activist', contributed to developing the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at Brooklyn Museum. Similarly, Sarah Peters has established MOMA's Women's Fund in New York, which has generated countless feminist-oriented exhibitions and conferences at MOMA. The Canadian Biennial *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* would not have been possible without the funding provided by art collector Michael Audain. In Norway, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, the Astrup Fearnley Museum and Ekebergparken have all been created by art collectors. Art collectors and strong sponsors can both enrich and diminish an institution's profile. Some of them are canon-oriented (focusing on safe choices), while others wish to highlight overlooked work, or focus on political criticism or striking innovations. While a strong investment culture has transformed large parts of Europe and driven alternative exhibition venues off the main streets, the tendency in Norway is still open. But it is important to look at which new tendencies extraneous to art are 'colonising' the field.

New Technologies: Digitisation

The museum sector and the art market are becoming increasingly digitised. This trend can help to make the field more efficient. New digital apps can help to enhance the viewing public's experience and learning outcome, and smart curators can incorporate new technologies in interesting ways. Just as often, however, new technology leads to the surreptitious introduction of a new type of market orientation and management thinking. Demands for increased revenues and higher visitor figures lead to museums using statistics and computers to register visits, *likes* and media coverage. Museums' communication and marketing departments gain a form of autonomy that is derived from business models rather than from curatorial assessments. It is also conceivable that museums will be able to register electronically which works are most popular, and then make sure that these works are always on

171 See Evensen 2012 and *Stopp oljesponsing av norsk kulturliv*, 2017.
172 See Greenberg 2017.

show in order to ensure high visitor figures, regardless of well-considered curatorial assessments. New technology relating to 'big data', 'real-time analytics', 'watch time reports' and 'remote sensing' can refine and nuance a number of management models that provide further support for New Public Management thinking. But the same technologies can also be used to professional, curatorial and artistic ends. Digitisation, online exhibitions and mobile information apps could potentially create new room for curating, criticism and educational elements. This is an area we should closely monitor in the future. More research is needed.[173]

The art market has long since moved into cyberspace. It is now largely on the internet. The art market has always been popular with more market-oriented curators and connoisseurs, but they too now appear to be facing a concrete challenge from super-fast computer programmes such as the *ArtRank* algorithm. It is software that monitors the global art market and tells you what is of highest 'value' at all times, what you should buy, what you should keep and what you should get rid of. The year 2014 was a record year for investments in art. Sales amounted to about £37 bn. Paul Gauguin's *Quand te maries-tu?* set a new sales record, fetching $300 million in 2015, and in 2017 Christie's in New York broke that record when they sold *Salvator Mundi*, believed to be painted by Leonardo da Vinci, for $450 million. This Eurocentric trend will also change, however. Since nouveau riche Chinese collectors entered the art market in large numbers in the 2010s, it is no longer modern European art that is most sold globally, but traditional Chinese art.

What is it that governs the art market? The herd mentality is strong. Art critic Brian Sewell's best tip is simple: 'If you do buy art, buy what everyone else is buying. It is an entirely false market and one day it will implode, but at the moment it is fiercely profitable.'[174] From the moment that 'value' is primarily assessed in quantitative (according to what most people buy) and not qualitative terms, computer-based monitoring will have enormous power. The algorithms will control the market. In a financial market with no quality discourses, just mass suggestion, no one will be faster or more precise than the algorithms. They represent the plain speaking of numbers.

Towards a new understanding of quality

The three factors – New Public Management, new economic structures and algorithmic curating of art – will probably challenge and change the role of

173 New research programmes such as KULMEDIA, initiated by the Ministry of Culture and the Research Council of Norway, show that research is increasing in this area.

174 Quoted in Christie 2015.

the curator in the future. Can the free curator produce an alternative understanding of quality within the limits of the new management models that are becoming increasingly dominant? Can the free curator achieve a role in the development of the art field as a vibrant and experimental laboratory for new visions and critical qualities? Doreen Mende, who was educated as a curator at Goldsmiths, University of London, puts the question as follows: 'Can we conceive of an exhibition space beyond the capitalist paradigm that operates so relentlessly to separate production from presentation?'[175]

New economic and technical paradigms should change the way we conduct research on curating and quality processes. While the curators of the 1990s viewed these processes in light of conflicts between aesthetic regimes, generations and institutions, we now need to examine more how understandings of quality are put under pressure, pushed and pulled, and shaped by a more complex network of actors. We need models that can enable us to study how curating and quality processes are the result of a number of changing constellations of human and non-human actors – artists, curators, galleries (institutions), educational considerations, audiences, affects, theories, trends in art history, management models, communication departments, capital, budgets, algorithms, the internet, the state, the market and nature. These 'actors', and many more could be added, both strengthen and weaken each other, and they appear in different series and combinations. They can also be put together in new ways to shed light on each other, and this kind of assembly or montage approach was already activated in the three curator models we have looked at here.

Szeemann's shamanistic model created montages of different temporalities and sensualities. He linked past works to present works and let conceptual strategies confront new sensualities. Different power fields were interconnected, and he invited the viewing public to experience networks of forces from the past and present, concepts, and sensualities. The quality resided in the experience of the networks and connections Szeemann directed. The discursive has a stronger place in Henmo's and Steihaug's curating. They emphasise *the connections* to social and political discourses that surround the artworks. Appropriation art is highlighted at the expense of painterly modernism. Nevertheless, painting can also be reassessed and understood in new ways, as Steihaug did in his doctoral thesis on Bendik Riis (2008). Reflection on one's own artistic standpoint and expression emphasises knowledge about the network of associations and horizons the expression forms part of. Thereby, artists are interpreted as active actors in a discursive field. With his 'educational turn', Ekeberg goes even further in involving

175 Mende undated.

theoretical reflections on the field that make the network even more open. Historical axes (National Touring Exhibitions past and present), competing fields (architecture and design) and dissemination institutions (TV and newspapers) are brought in as important actors.

An actor-network theory can elucidate even better the connections in the new, complex art field. The actor-network theory is a further development of discourse theory, but one that to a greater extent includes non-human forces, such as technology, as dynamic and decisive actors.[176] Here, the actor concept and the network are key factors. The actors are more than people, and the network extends far beyond the exhibition space. The curator and the artworks find themselves in different institutional, technical and semantic networks. The curator's role is thereby to highlight these networks as connections, associations and horizons – often in the most physical and material sense. The curator becomes a *bricoleur* who creates montages – not montages in the cinematic sense, but rather in the sense used by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Their term *agencement* can be translated as 'assemblage' or 'montage'.[177] The art (whether a painting, a concept or a performance) comprises such montages that consist of composite elements that tie things together in new expressive fields and actions. Through his or her practice, the curator enters into this *act of montage* by creating an active production space where the viewing public can also be put in a position to participate in the act. These acts of montage are part of the quality process. In brief, we can say that the quality lies in the experience of strong and weak connections that are triggered by coming face to face with the works in an exhibition. Here, artistic quality is not linked to individual works seen in isolation from the exhibition context, but must instead be linked to the way the work is *montaged* into the production space and the *poièsis* of the exhibition as a whole.

Today, the challenge for both artists and curators is how to trigger new connections that relate to topical issues such as technology, nature, management and control. How can these issues be included among the better-known 'actors' in contemporary art, such as aesthetics, technique, politics, discourse, institutional elements and so on? The curator's task is thus to use his or her knowledge and innate talent (which inevitably contains an element of the shamanistic) to highlight the connections he or she believes are most relevant here and now, because they are most pertinent. Curating becomes a matter

176 The actor-network theory was formulated by Bruno Latour (2007). It is not primarily intended to address art and aesthetics, but it has inspired a number of attempts to do so, from Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics to Anna Munster's network *aesthesia*.

177 In the Danish edition of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work, *Tusind plateauer* (2005) [orig. *Milles plateaux* from 1980], *agencement* is translated as 'montasje' (montage) in this sense of the word.

of interpreting and mediating montages – in all spaces. The quality of this process lies in how the curator invites the viewing public or user into the act of montage in question.

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The dramaturgy of quality concepts: From describing to prescribing (stage) art

Reflexive étude

Tore Vagn Lid

Upbeat

A concept is something that is both created and has creative effect. It is both produced and produces. A concept is created and launched through language. In a sea of words, it starts a (re)creating process, clashes with other concepts, runs aground, links to and builds bridges for new juxtapositions, uncovers unrealised relationships and gives birth to new words, new meanings, new ways of seeing, hearing and sensing. Thus, on a drift through language, it will indisputably land far away from a destination originally staked out for it when first it was launched. And so it also is with the concept of 'quality'.

Preface

Two spectators watch the same production: they see the same scenography, listen to the same actors on stage, on the same evening, at the same time, and from more or less identical seats. Nevertheless, they make two radically different critiques, two counterpoints, two widely divergent assessments of artistic quality, of what is good and what is not. Is this not the essence of artistic criticism? Are we talking about the eternal damnation of the quality concept, the impossibility of leaving the relativising magic circle of subjectivity? If so, is it then possible or even useful to dig deeper into the subjective judgements of taste (or for that matter, of those who judge taste) to reflexively ask *which*

qualities of a production are understood/captured, which are emphasised, by whom, when and according to what rationale? This author believes so. Not with the ambition to attack a specific 'view' or 'ear', but first and foremost to trace what I experience as the *special dramaturgy of the art concepts*, hence how differing concepts of quality also retroactively affect the aesthetic options we have in art – affect what can viably be produced, and therefore ultimately what can be presented. Here I am close to the Greek meaning of the word dramaturgy, understood as *affective action* or action that has an impact. In an attempt to turn the traditional focus on impact from questioning the effect of a specific artistic work and to rather ask about the impact of the concepts themselves, it becomes possible to ask how concepts that apparently merely *describe* a phenomenon, a trend or a movement in contemporary art in themselves have a performative effect or impact on the same phenomenon. After almost 20 years as a creative performer – alternating between reflexive practice and practical reflexion[178] – I have time and again been able to observe the following: as with many so-called theoretical discourses, the quality discourse and how it is conducted directly affect the artistic work itself. The reflexive call for the dramaturgy of the quality concepts is therefore not to be located above or outside, but is itself an important part of an artistic practice.

For a reflexive dramaturgy

First, such a dramaturgical strategy means to require from the concept 'quality' its specific qualit*ies*. This approach is therefore about getting beyond the concept of quality as an often tacit – *a priori* – status as 'quality art', in order to critically question the specific quality parameters used to argue and judge in specific contexts. Methodologically, this inquiry is done when the prism for the dramaturgical analysis is delimited in time and space and focuses on one specific field, theatre, or theatre art. With its focus on Norwegian examples, it opens for comparative juxtapositions, where different (receptive aesthetic) views and ears may be compared. In brief: Which qualities are seen and heard in the encounter with 'the same' work or performance, and why? From this point, another aspect of the dramaturgical analysis is articulated. Even if the concept 'quality art' – or more specifically 'quality stage art' – in this manner may be rendered more porous and put (critically) in movement,

178 Within sociology more broadly - the field of origin - reflexivity means an act of self-reference where examination or action 'bends back on', refers to, and affects the entity instigating the action or examination. It commonly refers to the capacity of an agent to recognize forces of socialization and alter their place in the social structure.

the reflexive question remains, which is how these different quality concepts concretely affect what they are intended to make judgements about.

The issue of quality concepts as 'interventions', as in themselves affective actions, brings us to the theatre field as an – in a Bourdieusian sense – interest field of counterparts. In such a field of tension, shifting constellations and power relations will necessarily act differently upon the options artists have. It is the movements and effects of the quality concepts in this dynamic field which ultimately render it meaningful to speak of their dramaturgy. The dramaturgical question is thus expanded to encompass a question in principle about motivation, tenability and effect: Who and what controls the ups and downs of these different quality concepts? When are these concepts and their fluctuations the result of genuine insights, and when do they rather serve as placeholders for more or less financial or symbolic 'business interests'? When does their effect represent a productive opening, and when do they have a regressive or closing effect?

The decisive factor here is a shift in the relationship between what over time has become a dichotomy separating two dramatic art fields, that is, the so-called *free or independent (theatre) field* and the *institutional (theatre) field*. By grasping the sociological field concept and delimiting it more clearly in relation to a more open-field concept, Norwegian theatre now essentially appears to be one structural *tension field* rather than two separate fields. Progressive guest performances, experimental co-operations and a higher degree of mobility, both of stakeholders and of preferences, have over time created an exchange between the 'free' and the 'institutional' which has changed the institutional expectations of the entire theatre field. Progressive guest performances, transcending experiments and having a higher degree of mobility, both of stakeholders and of preferences, have over time created an exchange between the 'free' and the 'institutional' which has changed the institutional expectations of the entire theatre field. When one position is displaced in such a tension field, the other positions are also shifted. This shift will in turn influence the way key stakeholders define and position themselves in relation to each other, to the public and to funding authorities. A change or shift of artistic expressions and stakeholders from one field to another – as in the case of *Rimini Protokoll* and the Wooster Group in the National Theatre in Oslo or in awarding the Ibsen Prize to Heiner Goebbels or Forced Entertainment – will affect the very logic of the field. This is because major paradigm shifts, where something was 'reserved' for one stage or one institution and then 'taken over' by another, will necessarily put institutions and stakeholders under pressure, therefore requiring the redefinition of their positions to ensure legitimacy, status and – ultimately – funding. In the field, a logical consequence of such challenges will be new attempts at distinctions, and new endeavours to define aesthetic dividing lines in relation to what at any time is 'good' or 'poor', 'in'

or 'out', 'worth the effort' or 'stagnant and uninteresting'. The shift in what, inspired by Bourdieu, could be called the *distinction-economy* of the theatre field will thus of necessity act (reflexively) back onto how quality concepts spread, how they are (trans)formed, given names and then used.

Turning the focus from the work's (performance's) own internal dramaturgy to what ultimately affects this dramaturgy from the outside is a strategy that opens the door to an emergent tension in the discourse about Norwegian theatre. A development is observed, where what one side emphasises as qualities of a production, another side considers shortcomings or flaws. In pursuing the distinction between *dramatic* and *post-dramatic theatre*, not only as development features *in* the art itself, but also as reinforcing dividing lines in the *reception* of theatre/stage art, the tension is captured as a type of epistemological rupture. Here it is impossible to exit from an aporia, or a *deadlock* in the quality discussion itself, without also making oneself aware of a fundamental antagonism in what are experienced as specific qualities of a contemporary work of art.[179] Highly effective concepts and (epistemological) categories such as 'progress', 'dramatic (tension) curve', 'substantial/holistic characters', and 'representation' live off of and stem from the dramatic theatre's gravitational field. From here they constitute established categories which over years have been challenged by the more or less articulated quality parameters of a post-dramatic theatre.

Redefining the field: 'free' versus 'institutional'

The sociological field is often talked about as if it were a geographically delimited area, a landscape or a topography consisting of more or less static formations.[180] However, the analytical strength of the field concept is found in the opposite: against the topographical harmony of a landscape, the field concept – as stemming from electro-physics and the art of war – highlights precisely the tension-filled relationships *between* the individual components which together make up the logic of a specific field. As a counterpoint to the static and harmonic 'side-by-side' structure of the geographical landscape, the field itself is determined by positions in reciprocal tensions. Hence, the individual field is also defined according to how positions keep shifting in relation to each other, so that in fact, no field exists beyond or outside of these continually shifting relationships. 'The electric field depends on the tension', Statnett writes in its definition of electro-magnetic fields, thus

179 The concept of epistemological ruptures is developed by the French science philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) (for example, Bachelard 1976).

180 For development of the field concept in a sociological sense, see Bourdieu 1979 and 1993.

pointing out the essential – even for the concept of more or less 'free' and 'unfree' fields in theatre art.[181]

During the last twenty years, it has become common to speak in Bourdieusian terms about different 'fields' in Norwegian theatre.[182] So today we talk fluently about 'the free, or independent (theatre) field' versus 'the institutional (theatre) field'. However, if our focus is on the field as a *tension* field and not as a more or less statically defined area (topography), it is then possible to ask how fitting it is to maintain such an analytical dichotomy. Is it not rather the tension relations between the more or less institutional and more or less free positions, manifestations and constellations which in reality now constitute the theatre field in Norway, far more than two separate fields with their autonomous positions and relations? The argument may be formulated as a general suspicion or hypothesis: if progressive forces inside traditional theatre institutions adopt positions previously held by programming stages and free stakeholders, it will lead to a shift of positions even within these organisations.

A look into the development of Norwegian theatre clearly reveals a field undergoing transformation: the static entrenched positions between 'free experiments' and 'institutional processing of classics', which towards the new millennium could virtually be taken for granted, have time after time been challenged. Aesthetic and organisational 'borders' have been challenged by cooperations transgressing institutionalised borders, and the praxis of guest performances has exposed the traditional audience to more experimental forms of theatre. An increasingly efficient and user-friendly internet giving both audience and artists access to international expressions and discourses, the mobility of artists (think for example of the Norwegian 'artist colony' in Berlin) and more diverse and mixed educational backgrounds: these are all among the variables that over time have influenced the very structure of the

181 See www.statnett.no/Samfunnsoppdrag/Sikkerhet/Elektromagnetiske-felt/ (downloaded on 08 August 2015).

182 Dag Østerberg's book *Kritisk situasjonsfilosofi* [Critical situation philosophy] has made me aware of how the neo-Kantian philosopher of science, Ernst Cassirer, approaches and contributes to clarifying such an understanding of the field concept as a relational tension field. Cassirer writes about a movement in science, from 'substantialist' towards a relational perception in the work *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff. Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen der Erkenntniskritik*: 'Already with the transition to the field theory this emerged clearly. For the field is the essence of pure effect, pure relations between "power lines" that are no longer necessarily tied to a material substrate' (Cassirer 1910, p. 278, and Østerberg 2011, p. 174) (my translation). In *Philosophie der symbolische formen III* he continues this line of thought by connecting to Maxwell's definition of light as an electro-magnetic field: 'The reality we call by the name "field" can no longer be thought of as a complex of physical objects. Rather, it expresses the quintessential physical relations' (Cassirer 1923, pp. 544–545, and Østerberg 2011, pp. 175–176) (my translation).

theatre field. Also important for this change is the parallel development within the field(s) of music and visual arts, revealing an openness towards inspiration from theatre/performance. Illustrative of such a structural transformation is, for example, the awarding of the Ibsen Prize to the composer and director Heiner Goebbels and the performance collective Forced Entertainment, stakeholders who only a few years ago belonged to the inner core of experimental theatre and experimental music theatre. This change also applies to the National Theatre's programming of the documentarists in the German artist collective *Rimini Protokoll*, the cooperation between the Norwegian Theatre (*Det Norske Teatret*) and the National Stage (*Den Nationale Scene*) and the director Robert Wilson, the co-production by Bergen International Festival and Christoph Marthaler, and Norwegian international theatres' series of guest performances and co-productions with experimental actors such as the American Wooster Group, the German Frank Castorf, the Danish Fix and Foxy, the dramatic art group Goksøyr and Martens or the Danish-Norwegian artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset. For several years, the Norwegian Hedda Prize – not long ago the domestic theatre award of institutional theatres in Norway – has been awarded to artists and performances linked to what traditionally have been the programming stages of the free field. Thus, the awarding in 2015 of the Hedda Prize to stakeholders such as Lisa Lie and *Verdensteatret* was appropriately celebrated by press releases and news reports submitted by the respective co-producers Black Box Teater in Oslo and BIT Teatergarasjen in Bergen.[183]

Repositioning and 'distinction-economy'

Pierre Bourdieu wrote about how some individuals and groups always try to improve their status (symbolic power) by producing minor differences in

183 It is obviously possible to argue that 'the free', or 'independent field' is a 'sub-field' within a Norwegian field of theatre. A fundamental problem with such an analytical division or subordination is that one will quickly lose sight of the specifically *relational* aspect of the theatre art field as a tension field, where movements within the 'institutional' affect movements 'outside' and vice versa. Conversely, it is important to clarify that the attempt to (re)define the theatre art field from two to one *field* in no way alters the value of the concept 'free' or 'independent' theatre/stage art. Rather, an articulated idea of what at any time may influence and limit such a 'free space' is in itself a requirement for being able to preserve the experimental aspects of theatre/staged art. Seen in this way, it is precisely the fast development of a 'free' or 'independent' (Norwegian) stage art that has contributed to push forward these processes of change in the field concept seen as a whole: The possibility of alternative (experimental) organization, cooperation across established hierarchies and borders between professions, fewer bureaucratic barriers, and broader geographic and cultural mobility and change made a basis for new forms of expression and ways of working that in the next round have challenged traditional institutions to take greater risk and show more willingness to engage in artistic experiments. This is an ongoing productive dialectic that has contributed to – and still contributes to – renewal and movement in Norwegian theatre art.

taste and behaviour.[184] The logic of these strategic distinctions equals strategies to be found in an ordinary school class: those trendsetting class members wearing a particular type of shoe, coat or hairstyle tend to respond to others trying to catch up with these trends by changing the style, or introducing a new detail – a small but decisive difference – so they again pull ahead. In this minor leap, this small *trick*, lies the decisive aspect – the distinction.

A problem with applying this distinction logic to art in general and to contemporary art in particular is that it will always also be able to underplay the genuinely innovative in art. Avant-garde and distinction are logically linked: the vanguard is always the vanguard in relation to – that is, as distinguished from – something else. Allowing for the danger of reductionism following in the wake of a Bourdieusian art perspective does not mean the same as losing sight of this logic field. If so, one risks confusing the sociological with the aesthetic. Thus, if one allows for what could be called the potential of sociological reductionism, the following perspective becomes viable: if traditional institutional positions are shifted, the structural underpinnings are also shifted – including for the established 'free/independent field' and its institutions. Such a development might create conditions for a dual transformation in the field's own economy, where the 'free' or 'independent' institutions that come under pressure will attempt to redefine their positions to ensure legitimacy, status and ultimately also funding. Redefining one's position in a field may also imply an attempt to distinguish oneself from other positions by moving or (re)positioning oneself (relationally) to them. Therefore, in this economy of the field lie the underpinnings for new attempts at distinctions on the concepts level, at innovation of trends and of active phasing out of the old ones.

In the attempt to approach the theatre field as a dramaturgical 'work surface', or a tension field, I have over time been looking for theoretical tools and conceptual aids. How does one adequately capture the logic in the forces which must have a controlling effect on theatre art and the theatre artist? Perhaps the most important aspect here is a fundamental insight from the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) that institutions in themselves create or lend themselves to behaviour. Weber opens for a sociological approach which both leads directly to and also may help instantiate Bourdieu's system of concepts. Precisely because a field such as the Norwegian theatre field is generally organised around a braided network of different, larger and smaller – newer and older – institutions, it is difficult to understand this specific tension field without simultaneously capturing the different ways of working and influencing that the institutions have. This difficulty applies to

184 Bourdieu 1979.

theatres, programming stages and educational institutions. Hence the institution concept contributes to illuminating theatre/staged art as a materially sluggish art form, where major resources – human and economic – in general are required to implement substantial changes, and where frameworks, agreements, stage structure, play and rehearsal frequencies gravitate around a basic institutional model for organising art performances. This model is in turn founded on a dramatic regime or paradigm, which thus in its very structure will offer resistance against changes in the dramatic manner of thinking and working with theatre.[185]

Legitimacy and quality: The performative aspect of art concepts

Motto: The distance is short from describing to prescribing art as a function or a task.

For a reflexive dramaturgy, it will be necessary – albeit far from sufficient – to examine new art concepts and categories in light of such an economy of distinctions. This need for examination does not in any way mean that new concepts and new paradigmatic turns may not be fundamentally aesthetically anchored and simultaneously articulate essential and productive movements in contemporary art. However, if such concepts are created and put into circulation primarily as a field-based currency, these are in themselves dramaturgical acts with decisive implications for the artist. A few examples may help to instantiate these questions.

The quality of 'outsiderhood'

Around 2010–2011, a turn may be seen in the rhetoric used in the discussion about Norwegian stage art and public funding of the 'free' or 'independent' field. From a long-term and established focus on free groups and institutions

185 With this problem two other, often overlapping, concepts are put into play, that is, 'dispositive' and 'apparatus', as they are found in (highly) different variations and facets, particularly in a French tradition, but also in the young Bertolt Brecht. A particularly relevant contribution here is the philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard's fundamental idea that a dominant knowledge or science at any time is sustained by a braided network of self-confirming knowledge. Bachelard's concept of 'epistemological ruptures' is important in our context because it indicates that a given braided network of knowledge renders it possible to see/hear something, but nothing else. Transferred to theatre/staged art, a similar idea will be that the division between dramatic-dramaturgical 'knowledge' and post-dramatic 'knowledge' enables one to experience or have an ear for something, but also to remain deaf to something else. Different concepts about 'dispositive' and 'apparatus' are later developed by philosophers such as Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben.

that were encouraged to cooperate, the rhetoric turned towards so-called 'outsiderhood'.[186] The shift from a focus on cooperation to a focus on outsiderhood is played into discussions about allocating public funds to the independent theatre scene.[187]Hence there is a movement where the concept of outsiderhood is also made into a relevant quality for financial funding. This movement gives rise to a new dichotomy where outsiderhood is logically placed opposite *insiderhood*. More bluntly: what was long a recognised quality of the 'free/independent field' – the ability and initiative to collaborate, enter into a dialogue, etc. – may suddenly appear to have been replaced by the very opposite. It is fully possible, of course, to see such a qualitative shift on the premises of an autonomous discourse in the independent art itself, with an art expertise rationale, and supported by prominent theory and/or artistic works. But as a field of logic speculation or suspicion, it is also possible to envision that the motivating force behind such a turn is connected to a shift in the relationship between the 'institutional' and the 'free/independent field', as outlined above. If so, such inventing of new words/concepts and establishing of dichotomies may just as well be a symptom of traditional stakeholders and institutions having come under pressure, and that to ensure resources and legitimacy they must reposition themselves in relation to the entire theatre field. Using the premises of such a logic, the shift of focus towards 'independence' or 'outsiderhood' may be understood as a (distinguishing) countermove against the increasingly comprehensive cooperation and exchange in the theatre field. Rather than being anchored in art, the grounds for highlighting this concept of independence as a quality may be traced to a structural interplay between status, legitimacy and self-preservation, where 'free positions' first and foremost are defined negatively and in contrast to 'institutional positions'. Such repositioning may in turn mean once again revitalising modernist parameters of artistic quality, where – as for example in the case of the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno – negation, encapsulation and withdrawal become qualities deeply connected to an understanding of aesthetic truth. If such positioning is transformed into curatorial practice,

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186 'Støtte til fri scenekunst fra Kulturrådet' [Support of independent theatre from Arts Council Norway], edited press release from Arts Council Norway, on *Scenekunst.no*, 12 June 2006. Retrieved from http://arkiv.scenekunst.no/artikkel_2453.nml accessed 07.08.2015. See also: 'Støtte til fri scenekunst fra Kulturrådet' [Support of independent theatre from Arts Council Norway], edited press release from Arts Council Norway, on *Scenekunst.no*, 9 June 2011. Retrieved from http://arkiv.scenekunst.no/artikkel_8303.nml accessed 07.08.2015. On the concept of 'outsiderhood' ('utenforskap'), see the Arts Council Norway conference: 'Utenforskapets verdi' ('The value of outsiderhood') http://www.kulturradet.no/arskonferansen-2015/program

187 'Kritisk blikk, kunstnerisk mot og utenforskap' [Critical view, artistic courage and outsiderhood], in *Scenekunst.no*, 12 June 2006. Retrieved from http://arkiv.scene-kunst.no/artikkel_8303.nml accessed 07.08.

into art criticism and/or art funding policy, the practical-dramaturgical effect may mean restricting the options for action in artistic projects which consider cooperation and overarching exchange between stakeholders and institutions the very *underpinning* of innovation, development and awareness-raising in theatre art.[188] Hence the (dramaturgical) effect of a rhetorical-aesthetic shift, to the extent it is transformed into active or passive funding policy, may be that painstakingly built cooperative constellations and cooperative competences break down or are disrupted, and that potential portals for new encounters between innovative theatre and new public groups are narrowed.

The quality of 'internationalisation'

An increasingly voiced credo in the discussion on art is the concept of 'internationalisation'. For an artist or a collective of artists to be able to invoke an international circle of interest in the form of invitations, agreements or displays/performances, this in itself appears to be an acceptable confirmation of high artistic quality. The value of internationalisation here appears to correlate with a renewed focus on quality and quality assurance by the funding authorities, from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Much suggests that the paired terms 'international' and 'internationalisation' are able to offer compatibility – a type of communicative formula – where an often fuzzy, polyphonic and transitory theatre field can 'document' its artistic quality to expert committees and the public authorities.[189] That a work of art or an artist is able to gain a foothold outside its country of origin may be a good indicator of artistic qualities. Nonetheless, it is still necessary to ask critically about the extent to which the internationalisation here is linked to a specific artistic and aesthetic discussion, and conversely, how much of the rhetoric finds its rationale and motivation in strategic distinction-economy positions. Here the value of the hermeneutics of suspicion applies, not only to the artist himself, but also to the funding authorities and their dealings

188 A reflexive dramaturgy, as found here, of course invites the author to justify his perception of his own position in relation to the field he is writing about. In my own case, for years I have been an instigator of transgressive cooperation between artists from different fields, between stage and music artists and academia, and between institutional theatres and free/independent groups. The collaborations between Transiteatret-Bergen and Den Nationale Scene (2005/06/09), and between Tt-B and Rogaland Teater/the National Theatre (2008/09), were among the first collaborations between traditional institutional theatres and free/independent groups in Norway.

189 In a working seminar for this collection of articles in Copenhagen in April 2015, the social anthropologist Odd Are Berkaak spoke about what he called a new 'world championship thinking' in academia. The concurrence of these two trends might in itself have been the subject of closer examination.

with the field's own stakeholders and curators. Given this suspicion, it is fully possible to seek the dramaturgical effects of such a (rhetorical) adulation of the international, precisely as interventions with direct consequences for the production of art.

One such effect might be predetermined and standardised artistic expressions, already (fully) adapted to the *idea about* an international (theatre) art market. The innovative Norwegian choreographer and director Jo Strømgren can, for example, satisfy quality parameters such as internationalisation and international circle of interest by inventing a stage language of 'gibberish' – which lends itself well to transcending linguistic barriers. Considering a potential link between internationalisation and this quality of language-transcending stage art, it is natural here to consider the European focus over the last ten to fifteen years on dance-based expressions and on comprehensive international curating of contemporary dance. In purely field-logic terms (but without falling into reductionist one-factor explanations), such a dramaturgical force of gravity, emerging from the expectations of internationalisation, will provide visual and aphasic parameters with an advantage against language-based expressions. Another potential dramaturgical effect may here be traced in often unarticulated demands for a performance potential of *mobility* (i.e., reducing the format to, for example, a theatre performance). This move may manifest itself in demands for a smaller number of performers, limited technical or stage rigging requirements and simple technical manuals (i.e., in the form of variations on the credo *less is more*). If such an adaptation of the aesthetic turns out to be the art production's answer to a requirement for 'the international' and the boom times of internationalisation, it gives rise to methodological issues, where one quality parameter (internationalisation) in fact narrows the aesthetic opportunities of theatre. For example, reduction of format, stripping down of the production's aids, will also highly influence a theatre that sees its medium as a multidimensional experiential space. For an artistic work to adapt (deliberately or not) to expectations of an international standard and to endeavours to satisfy these will also influence the potential of theatre as a critical dialogue with its given cultural, linguistic and financial circumstances. It may have been this paradox that the Norwegian writer and professor of rhetoric Georg Johannesen sought to solve already at the end of the 1990s by reminding us that 'nothing can be international without first being local'.[190]

190 Georg Johannesen's presentation 'Om form og innhold i kunsten' [On form and content in art] at the opening of BIT Teatergarasjen, 1998 (after memory).

What controls the 'mainstream'?

The insight of quantum physics in the field of experimental particle physics, that is, that the observer by observing changes the observed, is valid to an even stronger degree in the different fields of art. It is stronger because the influence here is dominated to a much larger degree by a mutual relation between the observed quality and the observer's grip on what is observed. An appropriate example – not least in theatre – is the widespread use of the *mainstream* concept. The claim that something (or someone) is (has become) mainstream is an ontological definition (something 'is' or 'exists') which is characterised by negating its performative action because this mainstream does not exist before or independently of what or who controls it. The stream – so to say – thus does not flow independently of its description. As (dramaturgical) action within the distinction-economy of staged art, such a dramaturgical turn may be effective because it – even indirectly – enables a quality judgement: naming particular phenomena as mainstream indicates (dialectically) that there also exists something that is not mainstream, some distinguishing mark which qualitatively makes it stand out – even if this 'something' needs to be determined beyond the purely negative, that is by *not* being mainstream. For a reflexive dramaturgy, the following questions then apply: Who understands/captures this mainstream, when, on what grounds, based on which position and which motivation? In brief, who and what determines the direction of the flow by identifying it, and giving it a name, and how does such an action relate to the field's distinction-economy? When does mainstream become a tributary and the tributary the mainstream, and when does it in itself become mainstream to call it mainstream?

Post-dramatic turn?

The concept of the *post-dramatic theatre,* initially systematically developed by the German theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1999, is first and foremost a well-documented description of how something remarkable has taken place in dramatic art from around the end of the 1970s onwards.[191] Speaking about drama and dramatic art(s) is no longer sufficient for understanding the movement that has actually taken place in the theatre. After several centuries where it has been appropriate and unproblematic to equate drama with theatre, theatre has been changing its colours and moving on, while the language – the concept of 'the dramatic' – lags behind. Put another way, in a post-dramatic perspective the dramatic text (the drama)

191 See Lehmann 1999.

is no longer the obvious and natural centre of theatre. Thus, this is what the concept attempts to retrieve of the post-dramatic: something coming *after* the dramatic. As I understand and use this concept, perhaps more than in Lehmann's writings from 1999, the crucial moment here is the democratisation of dramaturgical parameters as the principal potential within a theatre, where theatre itself is viewed as a *polyphonic experiential space*. Principal in this context means that right from the start of a production, the possibility is left open that other aspects of theatre than the dramatic text may also assume the leading role in a performance, whether it be the actor's body, light, sound, music, scenography objects and installations, or the audience. The concept of the post-dramatic also implies that texts that are not dramatic may also form the point of departure for a performance on stage. Understood in this way, post-dramatic theatre is not the same as 'visual theatre', theatre without text or theatre without acting actors. Nor is it a post-modern theatre in terms of a 'post-political' theatre.[192]

It will be difficult to understand the transformation processes that have taken place over the last decades in Norwegian theatre without also understanding the breakthrough of the different post-dramatic manifestations on an international art scene. The mentioned guest performances by Heiner Goebbels, Robert Wilson, *Wooster Group*, *Forced Entertainment*, and *Rimini Protokoll* are here merely expressions of a far more fundamental transformation process, where new dramaturgies, new ways of thinking and new work forms are expanding a theatre field which for decades had its aesthetic centre firmly entrenched in counterpoint positions between the 'institutionalised theatre field' and the 'free field'. In the transition from seeing that something in the theatre takes place or is assessed as a reflex ('this is just how it is'), to something actually taking place according to reflection ('this is how it may be, because'), the concept of the post-dramatic as a *productive and opening* concept, a reflexive contribution towards a theatre more or less on institutional autopilot, is legitimised. Therefore it is not difficult to understand why the post-dramatic has also become (and continues to be) perceived as a threat: a complete apparatus of institutions, educations, positions and vocational titles is basically resting on the aesthetic-structural underpinnings of the traditional dramatic theatre, where the word 'theatre' itself finds its rationale in the idea of artistic interpretation and transformation of dramatic text, psychological-narrative role personification, the actor's representation of dramatic characters, and identification and illusion as mainstays of quality parameters. Challenging such a system of well-fitted functions, hierarchies and rules will necessarily influence the self-understanding, legitimacy and

192 See Lid 2015.

– ultimately – economy of stakeholders and institutions. However, after the smaller/alternative stages and eventually also main stages of the traditional theatre houses have been able to house a multitude of the most important international actors of the post-dramatic theatre, it is no longer so easy to reject the likes of Elfriede Jelinek, Heiner Goebbels, Christoph Marthaler or, for that matter, a performance by the artist groups *She She Pop* or *De Utvalgte* [The Selected], without risking the loss of symbolic capital which the position as artistically conservative and retrospective always may entail.

Quality in 'death's position': dramatic versus post-dramatic

The use of the concepts 'post-dramatic' and 'post-dramatic turn' (in German 'Die postdramatische Wende') has mainly been in connection with a production and work-aesthetic discourse, where reference is made to transformation processes in art production or performance of art. Descriptions of post-dramatic features of a work or production thus essentially indicate features of the composition or style. This focus has generally clouded what I see as a rising transformation process – or structural change – even on the *reception side*. The post-dramatic no longer comes into its own only as a qualitative shift in art production, but also comes to light in the new dividing lines in theatre reviews and the public debate *about* dramatic art. In the review of the production by the National Theatre of Ibsen's *Lille Eyolf* [Little Eyolf] (director: Sofia Jupither, *Amfiscenen*, September 2014), there is an almost ideal-typical – but nevertheless real – example of how this aesthetic rupture on the production side finds its counterpart on the reception side. The critic in *VG* [largest Norwegian national daily] writes:

> […] presented with nuances of anger, anxiety, shame and eventually an *emerging self-insight* in the duo Tjelta and Conradi. Tjelta balances between restless temperament, supressed passion and sharp undertones.[193]

IdaLou Larsen writes in her blog:

> […] the acting in an excellent manner shows the lack of contact and understanding between them. Two excellent role interpretations […][194]

193 http://www.vg.no/rampelys/teateranmeldelser/teater-naadeloes-familieskildring/a/23292281/ accessed 08.09.2015 (my italics).
194 http://www.idalou.no/pub/idalou/kritikker/?aid=2849 accessed 08.09.2015.

The critic from *Dagsavisen* [another Norwegian daily] commented:

> The acting in tandem with a solid and sharp Conradi is glib and elegant. When 'Lille Eyolf' fades out with a glimmer of hope which both shakes and pains us it is an *Ibsen triumph* […][195]

Virtually in counterpoint to these assessments is the review by *Morgenbladet* [another Norwegian newspaper]. Under the heading 'Ibsen til hverdags' [Everyday Ibsen], the performance is described as 'a drama about living together with absence of communication and suppressed emotions, with little between the lines'. And further:

> For me it speaks volumes that a *change of scene represents the most powerful moment of the piece*. Alfred is standing alone, looking out to the sea where his son recently drowned, while the stage is in darkness. Stagehands calmly clear away garden furniture and pillows; summer is definitively over. The stage is filled by fog, and one of the characters dressed in black enters with a garden hose and waters the terrace floor before he lets it rain on Alfred. This is a device that works well dramaturgically, and the dense *drama would have benefited from more such breaks*.[196]

The tension that emerges between these assessments is interesting because I believe it may articulate more than merely random subjective differences in taste. Through the clear differences, the structural outlines of a reception-aesthetic rupture emerge, where what gives grounds for (high) quality in one 'regime' becomes qualitative objections or shortcomings in the other. Thus, much the same properties ('qualities') of the performance are recognised, but they are given opposite qualitative assessments. Even if space considerations here do not allow me to go into detail, some of the quality parameters within a dramatic-dramaturgical horizon are particularly challenged when bearing in mind the post-dramatic:

– Good theatre primarily understood as realisation or implementation of an existing dramatic text
– Good theatre experience primarily understood according to the role of the audience as the appreciators of a work of dramatic art

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195 http://www.dagsavisen.no/kultur/2.738/en-eyolf-som-skjærer-i-hjertet-1.288304 (downloaded on 08 September 2015) (my italics).
196 http://morgenbladet.no/kultur/2014/ibsen_til_hverdags (downloaded on 08 September 2015) (my italics).

– Good acting primarily understood as credible (psychological) identification/empathy with (and in) the role or character
– Good dramaturgy primarily understood as (a) an overarching linear dramatic narrative, and (b) progress – as a time-based, organically structured (dramatic) tension curve

It is of course impossible to draw a general conclusion by exclusively bearing in mind the reception of *Lille Eyolf* at the National Theatre. If we consider a number of related opposites in reviews and critiques in recent years, and also in terms of similar tensions in the international art press, it is, however, possible to formulate a hypothesis with a relatively short time horizon: a dividing line between the dramatic and the post-dramatic may contribute to explaining how properties considered specific signs of quality in a production may also be the same properties used to make the opposite judgement.[197] Thus, from being linked until now to trends and development features *in* contemporary art, the post-dramatic 'rupture' also has an effect on the reception level – in art journalism and the public debate. If this hypothesis is correct, we are facing a trend which may be reinforced if new critical voices and new art experts, who to a much greater extent have grown up with (and are trained in relation to) post-dramatic expressions and work forms, start to make their mark in arenas previously reserved for stakeholders with training and preferences from the dramatic theatre's perspectives and quality regimes.

Raising one's awareness about such a(n) (epistemological) 'rupture' will be important, not only for various stakeholders in art, critics and journalists, but also in art administration. This applies particularly in a time when the quality concept appears to be assigned the role of some sort of least common denominator, a 'transdisciplinary policy' magic formula for the assessment, allocation and evaluation of art. First and foremost, this awareness is important because it may help to accentuate how concepts of quality are split along a dividing line, where qualities within an established dramatic receptive apparatus are in counterpoint to qualities open to the use of a post-dramatic eye and ear for contemporary theatre. But it is also important for rendering visible how much the use by art administrators and curators of different quality parameters will unavoidably have an impact on the movement possibilities of contemporary art. A quality regime derived from the premises of the dramatic theatre's tradition and institutions will, for example, affect the theatre's potential as a polyphonic experiential space of, in principle, equal parameters. Similarly, a (too)

197 This particularly applies to discussions about Gerhard Stadelmaier, for many years a critic in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and to discussions about Bernd Stegemann's two publications *Kritik des Theaters* and *Lob des Realismus*.

simple but still common (mis)understanding of the post-dramatic primarily as a theatre without text, without actors, or even without critical ambition will in itself limit opportunities that a post-dramatic approach actually calls out for. For a reflexive dramaturgy, one primary idea is therefore to render the rupture between the dramatic and post-dramatic as something more than merely an in-house expert discussion among artists in the theatre field. This expanded analytical view of the tension between the post-dramatic and the dramatic applies especially on the level of art critique, where the ability of a field to capture and articulate specific qualities of a performance also determines whether it will be possible to continue building on these qualities.

Translating qualities and effectful absence: On not having an ear for the musical qualities of theatre

If we consider the background, expertise and field of interest (preferences) of typical theatre critics, few have a musical gateway into theatre. Whether the critic's point of departure is purely journalistic or the science of literature or theatre, the absence of musical focus is a striking feature of the Norwegian as well as of the international theatre review. Traditions of education, where the emphasis on 'absolute music' corresponds to an equally 'absolute theatre', grounded in an understanding of theatre as literary drama, have sharpened the dividing line between theatre and music. This is a process of institutionalisation which over time has made it fundamentally difficult to explore, much less challenge, the music in the theatre and the theatre in the music. But the potential of theatre as a room/space for music and musicality is here also conditional on another effective structure. The critic's lack of musical focus causes these specific qualities of a performance, when and where they may occasionally arise, to be almost impossible to capture, articulate and circulate as critiques and reviews. Hence the musical qualities of the theatre will not be credited by the theatres and theatre administrations that at any given time, internally and externally (vis-à-vis the public and funding authorities), depend on the 'objective feedback' of the critic in order to legitimise their own choices and decisions. With this challenge, an essential incitement also disappears for the theatre/theatre leadership to preserve and build on the few music dramaturgical experiences and efforts actually undertaken. In such a structure, recognition from a specific expert community (such as performing musicians or musicologists) is insufficient, because they will have only peripheral positions in the logic of a field that permeates the (self) assessments and artistic priorities of stakeholders and institutions. Thus, the rupture between a dramatic and post-dramatic (pre) expectation may affect this level as well because it suggests which qualities can actually be captured, assigned value and – as a consequence – also be supported for further experimentation and presentation.

Dramatic art in a zone of productive uncertainty

The renewed and reinforced focus on artistic quality from the general public and funding authorities currently encounters a theatre field which together with the post-dramatic has moved into a zone of uncertainty, and where the understanding of quality has been split, becoming basically contrapuntal. What only a few years ago were virtually *a priori* truths about 'good' and 'poor', 'professional' and 'dilettante', 'relevant' and 'irrelevant', have come under pressure. Thus, a potential conflict can be seen between, on the one side, the aspiration of the general public of art politics to define quality and, on the other, an art field that is constantly moving. If the ambition goes towards polyphonic and open fields of art, quality as an interdisciplinary 'magic formula' – a response from cultural policy to quantifiable quality assurance – will readily appear to be at the expense of the productive conflicts which now permeate the entire theatre field.

At a symposium during the Bergen International Festival in June 2015, the impression that arose was of a restless European theatre which in times of crisis objects to established aesthetic quality judgements with their romantic and/or modernist suggestions.[198] These are stakeholders who are seeking renewed legitimacy in deliberate breaks with different institutional benchmarks.[199] Consequently, prominent artists literally leave the traditional theatre venues – including the modernist black boxes – thus also leaving the established art public space for a reality of social and political playing fields with highly different discourses and field logics. From a renewed interest in actionist and pedagogical strategies to attempts at (re)defining scenic spaces – material as well as virtual – beyond the theatre houses, established field structures are expanded, while established reception models for assessing artistic quality are challenged. Given such a situation, a quality discussion which chooses to retain a particular vocabulary, whether it is from modernist autonomy models or from the post-modern ideas of the 1980s and 1990s about the self-referencing play of art, will risk obstructing the very impulses it may be trying to discover.

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198 *Nytt teater – nye kunnskaper og ferdigheter?* [New theatre – new knowledge and skills?] Scenic symposium under the auspices of *Prosjektprogrammet for kunstnerisk utviklingsarbeid* [The project programme for artistic research] (Tore V. Lid / Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo (Oslo National Academy of the Arts), Bergen International Festival & Transiteatret-Bergen. Held in Cornerteatret, Bergen 02–03 June 2015.

199 This became particularly clear through presentations by the Hungarian director and theatre leader Árpád Schilling and the German dramaturgist and leader of Berliner Festspiele, Thomas Oberender. In different ways, an instant picture of a theatre moving into public combat zones is given here (for example Hungarian Krétakör), or theatre artists who are leaving the theatre houses for installations or spatial concepts, thus entering into a material exchange with the practices and institutions of visual art.

Postscript

Art theory and aesthetics are often combined with a belief that theory has an autonomous relationship to the art object it attempts to understand. The envisioned distance between the work of art 'in itself' and the person describing or writing about the work from the 'outside' has proven durable, both ways. But here there is a fundamental problem, because the theoretical 'conversation about art' is at all times at risk of covering up its own potential as effective and (more or less intended) self-fulfilling theory. For example, the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno's modernist dictum that each work of art 'is the mortal enemy of the other' is in itself fundamentally performative.[200] This statement works because it is able to influence the self-understanding of the contemporary art field and contribute to transforming it, both on the stakeholder level and – later – on the structural (or organisational) levels.[201] Therefore it is difficult to gain an adequate grip of an aesthetic without simultaneously understanding the aesthetic *effect history* of discourses which often assert that they enter into close dialogue with works of art to describe and interpret 'what art would have said if art had been able to speak'.[202] This aspect of more or less unintended effect is thus the backdrop for the argument about the necessity of thinking of dramaturgy as *reflexive dramaturgy*. In theatre, the distance between theoretical discussion and performative practice has long and profound traditions. The fear of academic thinking in a theatre which has largely based its understanding and its legitimacy on criteria such as spontaneity, authenticity and emotionality may therefore prevent the theatre and its agents from dealing reflexively with the forces of an aesthetic-dramaturgical nature which are not themselves part of the discursive logic of the theatre field, but which nonetheless have an impact on what may artistically be financed, produced and presented. A reflexive search for the dramaturgy of the quality concepts is therefore something more than an art theory affair. Hence, the very question of dramaturgy includes the place where performative-art practice meets a performative-art policy.

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200 'Jedes Kunstwerk ist der Todfeind des anderen', Adorno, Theodor W.: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Hg. Von Rolf Tiedemann. 20Bde. Darmstadt: WBG, her Bd.7, p. 59.

201 See Lid 2011.

202 'Deshalb bedarf Kunst der Philosophie, die sie interpretiert, um zu sagen, was sie nicht sagen kann, während es doch nur von Kunst gesagt werden kann, indem sie es nicht sagt' (Adorno 2003, p. 113).

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Novel, expressive and skilled!

Understandings of quality in three popular-music genres

Anne Danielsen

How can quality in different musical genres – with different values and different aesthetic orientations – be assessed and compared? In this chapter, I first scrutinise the understanding of three principal values – novelty, expressivity and skilled musicianship – in three popular-music genres: *electronica*, *indie* and *blues*, which all are either within or on their way into the realm of public art funding and cultural policy in Norway. I then explore the important dynamic between conceptualising quality, on the one hand, and non-conceptualised aesthetic experience, on the other, and conclude by outlining two extremes in the approach to assessment of quality: *boundless specialisation* and *genre-less generalisation*. These extremes point to an important dilemma, that is, on the one hand, the need to experience and assess each artistic expression on its own terms, and on the other, the need to rank and compare across genres. The aim of the chapter is to contribute to knowledge and reflection on differences in the understanding of concepts of quality in the field of music, and to add to the bases for making quality judgements.

Forms and functions: On the agreed quality standard of the genres

How quality in music is understood varies according to time and place, and according to who hears and sees. What is understood as quality at a concert by the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra in the Oslo Concert Hall is hardly deemed to be quality on a late Friday night in *Blå*, a club for quality dance music in central Oslo. What is quality at a blues festival is not necessarily quality at a jazz festival. Differing concepts of quality are obviously circulating – because of both stylistic differences and differences in the function of

the music or the framework within which the music is to function. A quick attempt at systematisation may lead to the following categories of quality:

– formal-aesthetic
– musicianship (i.e., art as skill)
– instrumental, for example, whether for nation building, regional policy, youth work, identity building, antiracism or therapeutic purposes (pleasure, relaxation, etc.)
– popularity-based, and this applies not only to commercial art, but also to the interest in whether art has a public in general, and
– institutional, that is, regarding the fact that the art institution defines and legitimises artistic quality.[203]

The axis may be simplified and we can state that the dividing line in practice is between primarily work-internal (formal and craftsman-like) and primarily instrumental quality concepts, between assessment of artistic criteria or assessment for other purposes, or simply between form and function.

The cultural policy decision-making apparatus today comprises a diversity of accepted forms and functions, and perhaps quality is found in precisely the correct *combination* of form and function. This new diversity of context-conditioned support-worthy forms and functions also represents a challenge. It is not given that the correct form is matched with the right function, and strange things may occur, as when for example music made for the dance floor is presented as a festival concert, or when a fine-tuned composition is played to a less than fully attentive club audience.

Even in music that serves the same overall function, for example music that is primarily made for listening, different quality criteria may apply. One type of music may be oriented towards rhythmic complexity, another towards harmony, and a third may not focus on complexity *per se* but instead exclusively focus on personal expression. In this context it may be useful to distinguish between style and genre. The former refers to musical characteristics, regardless of the music's function and its surrounding culture, while the latter is an attempt to embrace everything from aesthetics, values, behaviour and dress style to business models and the industry culture.[204] As Keith Negus has pointed out, genre does not stop at the doors of the music industry.[205]

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203 This division into understandings of quality is consistent with Gran's division into quality criteria in cultural policy, with the exception that she has formulated the institutional as a 'canon and cultural heritage criterion', thus not connecting it to the legitimising power of the institution (2014, p. 268).
204 For a discussion on the concept 'genre culture', see for example Toynbee 2000, pp. 102–129.
205 Negus 2013.

Any genre has its distinct corporate culture, and distancing oneself from the music-industry aspect of musical activity does not exclude the music-industry circle from the genre, but should rather be considered a genre-typical organisation of the relationship between artistic and commercial interests.

In principle, it may be claimed that any musical utterance embodies its own understanding of what its accompanying genre is. Just as any linguistic utterance normally reveals a genre, music signals its belonging within a genre, understood as belonging in a music culture having particular values for both form and function, as well as having norms for production, distribution and reception.[206] Finding that something is of poor quality may therefore reflect different things: sensing that the music complies with a certain quality standard, but ultimately finding it does not succeed; having problems deciding which standard is to be applied simply because it is unclear on a musical level (for example because of a vague stylistic profile or genre confusion); or, finally, finding that the *listener* does not have the right background and does not understand which standard the music is relating to.

Three quality concepts in three genres

Below I use as my point of departure three common descriptions of quality in the music field, 'novel', 'expressive' and 'highly skilled musicianship', and I illuminate how the values that these descriptions imply are understood in three music genres. Although all three values are important in our time and in part are used in parallel in discourses on artistic quality, they have a different historical and aesthetic anchoring. Novelty is the core value of modern art, while expressivity is a typical romantic value. Skilled musicianship has a less clear musical-historical anchoring, but has been important not least in the assessment of classical and traditional music.

The three values have had different degrees of importance for decision-making and cultural policy in the music field. In the Norwegian context, Arts Council Norway has played an important role as a source of funding for novel music through its management of *Norsk kulturfond* (the Norwegian Cultural Fund). Here an overarching aim has been to 'encourage contemporary art and cultural expressions'.[207] Novelty as a value in this context does not, however, refer to all forms of innovation, but has – in accordance with the Arts Council's traditional responsibility for modernist, composed music – focused on the material level (compositions), ideas (concepts) and/or technology. Expressivity is also a value with relevance for the funding from

206 Bakhtin 1986, pp. 61–67.
207 Arts Council Norway's Annual Report 2014, p. 7.

Arts Council Norway, which in its strategy for the music field for 2011–2015 states that it will fund 'new productions, *interpretative art* and activities of high quality'.[208] In the guidelines for funding of tours and concert activities under the Musician Funding Scheme (*Musikerordningen*) it is made clear that 'particular importance […] must be attached to performers with a *personal expression* in their genres'.[209] For its part, the Ministry of Culture gives large sums of money to the symphony orchestras, where skills or good musicianship in the sense of technical excellence are crucial. The anchoring of orchestras in a classical-romantic repertoire and romantic ideas would suggest that expressive power is also an important quality in this field. However, in practice there is a strong tendency to see high artistic quality as synonymous with excellent musicianship, while expressivity and originality are given less weight.[210]

Below I discuss the content of the three values 'novelty', 'expressivity' and 'skilled musicianship' in three music genres. First, however, I scrutinise what is understood as quality within the respective genre cultures.

Electronica as a genre has received public funding according to an artistic rationale since the 1990s.[211] The genre is a sub-category of electronic dance music (EDM), which over time has spread widely. In accordance with Lena and Peterson, one might describe EDM as a genre stream, that is, as a set of styles – 'a family of music' – which belong together or to the same musical-historical line of development, in this case the development of dance music and club culture.[212] Already in the 1990s the field had developed its own cultural hierarchy with 'accessible' Euro-house at the bottom and so-called

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208 Arts Council Norway. Music. Strategy 2011–2015. Retrieved from http://www.kulturradet.no/norsk-kulturfond/musikk (accessed 15.10.2015, my italics). Even if the term *new production* strictly speaking opens for new productions of both an innovative and a non-innovative nature, it is reasonable to assume what is meant here is not simply any production, but rather innovative new production. The overriding description of these three tasks has remained the same, verbatim, since 2006, see 'Norsk kulturråd. Strategi 2006–2009. Handlingsplan 2009' [Arts Council Norway. Strategy 2006-2009. Action plan 2009] (unpublished document dated 9 February 2009, case no. 09/006 for council meeting).

209 Norsk kulturråd. Musikerordningen: Turneer og konsertvirksomhet. Vurdering av søknaden [Arts Council Norway. The musician scheme: Tours and concert activities. Assessing the application]. Retrieved from http:// www.kulturradet.no/stotteordninger/konsertogturne (accessed 07.10.2015, my italics).

210 In an essay on quality in the performance of classical composition music, Håkon Austbø (2015) is critical of how 'correctness of notes', in the sense of absence of errors (wrong notes, wrong intonation, wrong rhythm), in practice works as the principal criterion when classical musicians are assessed in competitions or auditions. The criterion 'personal and unique interpretation' is at the bottom of the list, and is assigned little importance, according to Austbø.

211 An early example is the commissioned concert *Dawn at Vara* at the Quart Festival in 1994, funded by *Rikskonsertene* (Concerts Norway).

212 Lena and Peterson 2008, p. 699.

'intelligent' house and 'advanced' drum 'n' bass on top.[213] The somewhat sarcastic style designation IDM (intelligent dance music) reflects this development, and also shows the clear connection between the internal cultural hierarchy in the EDM field and the hierarchy in the music field in general, where music primarily made for dance traditionally has been considered as inferior, unintelligent and primitive.[214] It is important to point out, however, that only parts of the EDM field have been welcomed into the cultural-policy fold, more particularly those that have ties to or have been embraced by the avant-garde communities of art music and jazz. The legitimisation of the genre in a cultural-policy context has generally occurred through this crossover field of contemporary (art) music, contemporary jazz and EDM without the D, that is, EDM as art music (hereinafter I refer to this as electronica). Historically, however, danceability is a very strong value in this field. Additionally, sound quality is important, in the sense of choice of sound, processing of sound and dynamic sound effects (development of sound over time).[215] This emphasis on sound quality may be connected to the sensitivity for sound on the micro level, a sensitivity which is promoted by the repetitive structure of the music, but which may also be related to the use of mind-altering substances in the culture.[216]

The indie genre received its cultural-policy 'blessing' through the Øya Festival, which became a so-called Norwegian core festival (*knutepunkt-festival*) for rock in 2008 (the festival was first arranged in 1999). Becoming a core festival meant substantial public funding and also a particular responsibility for the genre involved.[217] The Øya Festival represents a broad genre base, but is culturally anchored in the 'indie genre', a term which today functions as the new name for high culture within contemporary rock. Indie can be seen as a continuation of the rock counterculture of the 1960s, and is thus part of the rock genre stream. This anchoring in rock culture is not only expressed through style features and a preference for bands and band instruments, but also refers to carrying certain values forward. Indie has roots in the institutional and aesthetic rebellion against the popular music industry, a classic rock theme, but has in recent decades itself become part of the mainstream. In an article on indie and the paradoxes of counterculture,

213 Gilbert and Pearson 1999, pp. 76–80.
214 I discuss this in more detail in Danielsen 2006b.
215 Zeiner-Henriksen 2010, chapters 7 and 8.
216 For a discussion of the relationship between repetitive music and sensitivity to sound on a micro level, see Danielsen 2006b, chapter 8. For a discussion on the importance of mind-altering substances for the aesthetic in EDM, see Gilbert and Pearson 1999, pp. 138–140.
217 For an overview of 'knutepunkt' festivals and when they were established, see *Stortingsmelding* no. 168 (2007–2008). The 'knutepunkt' festival funding scheme was terminated in 2015.

the music sociologist David Hesmondhalgh describes the genre's distaste for institutionalisation as an example of 'the complex relations between institutional politics and aesthetics in oppositional forms of popular culture'.[218] Even if the genre has become both commercially successful and at least partially embraced by cultural policy, the subversive point of departure will always accompany the genre as an important value. Bearing this in mind, the music anthropologist Wendy Fonarow describes indie as a combination of the Puritan and the Romantic.[219] The Puritan is expressed through aesthetic resistance to ornamentation and virtuosity. The sound and the style are rather characterised by striking simplicity, a crafty, confident naivety, a slightly rickety or raw sound, and by an 'untrained', that is, a desired or deliberate anti-virtuoso instrument treatment. These characteristics fit with typical rock ideological values, such as subversive authenticity and credibility, and with elements of more avant-garde strategies of concept art and staging.

The third genre, blues, has since the late 1980s enjoyed the status of traditional music worthy of funding. In Norway, the genre's legitimacy greatly increased through a wave of appreciation for so-called 'roots music' in the late 1980s, when powerful voices in circles around the Norwegian music journal *Beat* contributed to upgrading traditional American music forms such as country, bluegrass, Cajun, blues, etc. from rather low-status popular music (this particularly applied to country) to important expressions of traditional American music's long history. Thus, blues has been on an upward 'class journey' in the Norwegian music-policy landscape, which was confirmed in 2008 when Notodden Blues Festival (first arranged in 1988) was granted substantial public funding as a 'knutepunkt' festival.

Which artistic values are important in the blues genre? In his chapter about blues in the recognised encyclopaedic work *African American Music: An Introduction*, David Evans writes that the individual expressions of the musician and the ability to improvise are important in blues.[220] Blues is, moreover, a genre where mastering the tradition is essential. One must master the idiomatically correct playing technique and the accompanying sound ideal, including 'blue' notes, bending guitar strings and various dampening techniques to make the sound more percussive and to promote the correct articulation of phrases at the micro level. In addition to the expressive dimension and skilled musicianship, the text tradition is highlighted. The lyrics may be cutting, with elements of humour, irony and sarcasm, ambiguity, social commentary and criticism. Even if expressive qualities are important, and the

218 Hesmondhalgh 1999.
219 Fonarow 2006, p. 50.
220 Evans 2005, p. 80.

lyrics often describe 'the blues of life', there is little room for sentimentality, moralism or idealisation.[221]

Important values in each of the three genres are summarised in Table 1 below. To what extent are these captured by the more general values of novelty, expressivity and musicianship?

TABLE 1. VALUES OF THE THREE MUSIC GENRES SEEN FROM THE INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

GENRE	VALUES (INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE)		
ELECTRONICA	Danceability	Choice of sound / sound processing	Mastering technology
INDIE	Subversive and anti-commercial	Avant-garde	'Do-it-yourself' aesthetic
BLUES	Master the blues idiom and tradition	Individual expression and performative qualities	Striking lyrics: Humour / irony / communication

As pointed out above, musical novelty has commonly been understood either as innovation on the material level (compositions), as new ideas (concepts) or as innovative use of (new) technology. The electronica genre may be regarded as novel through its *state-of-the-art* use of technology, but this value may not necessarily be the genre's own. The genre's use of technology may also be assessed as skilled musicianship. However, the 'musicianship' value probably does not apply to the electronica genre because traditional instruments are seldom played in this genre. The understanding of quality which attaches importance to this value commonly pertains to genres that require mastery of a traditional instrument. If mastering modern music technology is considered an instance of musicianship, however, then this value is highly relevant. Assessing electronica as 'expressivity' may be relevant but depends on how the term is understood. If expressivity is interpreted according to an individual style, the value is relevant. If interpreted with reference to inner feelings, it is less relevant because such a romantic expressive aesthetic does not have a strong position in this genre. Concerning expressive power, understood as sincere or personal expressivity, this is not required and may even be wrong in relation to the genre. Nor are performative musicianship qualities (in the continuation of African-American music traditions) seen as important.

In contrast to EDM, expressivity is an important quality in the rock genre stream, which includes recognised forms of rock from the 1960s and later, including indie. In indie this expressive dimension can be based on third-person authenticity or on first-person authenticity, that is, in addition

221 Evans 2005, p. 84.

to having value as an authentic expression of the inner self, the interpretation may be an authentic expression of a group's experiences.[222] Indie also has features in common with the strand of punk that was inspired by British art school aesthetics: here concept and style were more important than skilled musicianship.[223] Because of the dual anchor in a romantic and avant-garde view of art, indie relates to both the quality discourse around powerful expression, in the sense of something personal or sincere, and the discourse that focuses on novelty. The value of skilled musicianship, on the other hand, is not very relevant in the indie context. Rather, the indie genre's traditional 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic has manifested itself in a deliberate attitude of anti-musicianship or a kind of punk ethos. However, not all indie adheres to this ethos, and over time the labels 'alternative pop'/'alternative rock' have emerged as names for the more technically 'sophisticated' parts of the field. Here artistic ambitions, competence and novelty in a modernist sense may be even more relevant than authentic expression.

In contrast to indie music, blues is very much traditional music. Innovation in traditional music rarely takes on the form of new compositions. To the extent that innovation is a relevant value, it concerns innovation on the interpretative level or innovative performative aspects. Expressivity is thus relevant in the sense of a characteristic individual style. If expressive power is understood in the sense of something personal, that is, as an authentic expression of the artist's inner feelings (authenticity in the first person), this value is, however, less meaningful. In general, an endeavour to find a genuine passionate expression is highly relevant in what may be called the country genre stream, including the entire singer-songwriter tradition in the popular music field, but not very relevant for the R&B genre stream, which blues is part of. The latter also has another tradition of lyrics, emphasising exaggeration, humour and irony, often in the form of striking one-liners (Muddy Waters's 'The Blues Had a Baby and They Named It Rock and Roll' may serve as an illustrative example).[224] If one analyses the expressivity of the blues from a rock-romantic perspective, then, the expressivity may quickly and somewhat erroneously be written into a discourse of sincerity and honesty.[225] All in all

222 The designations 'third-person authenticity' and 'first-person authenticity' are from Moore 2002.

223 See Frith and Horne 1987.

224 The same may be claimed about parts of the rock genre stream, which in addition to a romantic expressive aesthetic also embraces more obviously staged expressions. Thus, it becomes obvious how rock as a genre has drawn inspiration from both country and R&B.

225 Such passion is also a typical feature in the white rock public's interpretation of the expressivity of black music. This tendency is seen clearly, for example, in the common music-history presentation of the relationship between the soul companies Tamla Motown and Stax. See Danielsen 2012 for more on this theme.

(see Table 2), in blues, quality is determined by skilled and idiomatically correct musicianship. The genre does not fit the novelty paradigm, but quality may – admittedly with the pitfall of misunderstandings – be related to the value of powerful expression.

TABLE 2. THE QUALITIES OF THE GENRES FILTERED THROUGH THREE GENERAL VALUES IN THE MUSIC FIELD

GENRES / VALUES	NOVELTY	MUSICIANSHIP	EXPRESSIVITY
Electronica	Yes and no. Depends on which aspects of the music are in focus. Innovative use of technology.	No, in the traditional sense. Yes, in relation to mastering technology, choice and processing of sound, and programming.	No, does not relate to an aesthetic focused on expressivity.
Indie	Yes, if avant-garde novelty.	No. Anti-musicianship.	Yes. Rock authenticity. Romantic artist ideal. Focus on concept and 'difference'.
Blues	Yes and no. No innovation on the material level, only on the interpretative or performative level.	Yes, values highly skilled instrumentalists with a deep understanding of the tradition.	Yes, but not in the sense of genuine and sincere. Self-staging, humour and irony.

The discussion shows that all three values, 'novelty', 'expressivity' and 'musicianship', may have relevance for the genres in different ways if filled with content that fits the genre. However, the content, that is, how the terms are understood, will vary from one genre to the next. Qualities described with identical terms may in practice be very different, perhaps rendering it difficult to apply the terms across different genres, since they must be re-contextualised and understood anew each time they are applied to a different genre. Expressive power in the blues genre is different from expression in the singer-songwriter tradition, and novelty in indie is something else than novelty in classical composition music. Skilled musicianship in blues is different from skilled musicianship in electronica, and indie also has its own musicianship tradition: stylised ignorance is completely different from pure ignorance. Applying general musical quality criteria therefore involves the risk of causing misunderstandings, requiring high-level awareness about the special characteristics of the genres. In practice, it is not easy to ensure that this knowledge is in place when quality is to be assessed.

The genre differences may also be clouded by power relations. Hierarchical structures may lead the dominant genres' understandings of terms to be applied to other genres as well, resulting in what one may call 'hegemonic rejection'. One of the most difficult instances may be the instance in which the listener is apparently competent, but in fact is not (some sort of hidden misfit). Listeners interested in contemporary art music might, for example,

be drawn to electronica because the genre is technology-focused and in many cases also embodies some sort of experimental aesthetic. The problem is that electronica does not fit well with developmental musical forms, which are almost imperative in the art-music tradition. In the latter tradition, the general expectation is that music develops over time and has an organic, holistic form. As a result, listeners who have been formed by this tradition have a fundamental musical habitus of development: such a listener expects variation and progress, not always understanding that she actually cannot stand the characteristic repetitive aspect of electronic dance music. Therefore, she will call for precisely what she finds lacking: variation and development on the level of form, completely against the genre's own rules. Disliking a whole genre, or the principal aspect of one, is indeed a poor point of departure for providing relevant expert assessments of artistic quality in that genre. It is quite irrelevant, for example, to criticise contemporary art music for not being tonal.

Unacknowledged idiosyncrasies of this type are a great challenge for expert assessments in art and cultural policy. How should one uncover such tensions between musical habitus and musical poetics? And if they are actually uncovered, what amount of incongruity is problematic?

Even when one understands that flawed understanding is the reason for thinking that the blues is simple or that the playing skills in indie are disastrously poor, the problem is not solved. This brings us to the insights from the philosophical aesthetic, and the fact that it is very difficult to convince anybody lacking affinity for the blues that the blues is good or innovative in its way: an aesthetic judgement is never the result of a reasoned approach.

The particularity of expressions of art and the importance of aesthetic experience

How does one know when something has aesthetic quality? According to the philosopher Immanuel Kant, this knowledge occurs in the form of a feeling. Below I scrutinise what Kant's analysis of this feeling may mean for quality assessments in art and cultural policy.

Kant's *The Critique of Judgement* deals with the role of judgement in art and science.[226] The first section discusses the characteristics of aesthetic judgements, while the second section on teleological judgement deals with the role of judgement in knowledge. The aesthetic judgement requires the ability to see the world in a particular way, described by Kant as disinterested contemplation. In practice this means the ability to adopt an

226 Kant 1951.

aesthetic perspective on the world: the bowl of fruit is seen as an aesthetic composition, while the taste of oranges and apples is forgotten.

According to Pierre Bourdieu's 'sociological critique of the judgement of taste', taste is an ability that is learnt and connected to a special position in the social field.[227] He therefore attacks Kant's aesthetics for universalising a particular habitus, a particular learnt behaviour, and making this universalised habitus the basis for good taste in general. If, however, Kant's analysis is found valid beyond the particular behaviour which was closest to him, what then are the insights of his philosophical aesthetic? Kant's analysis of the judgement of taste concerns the human ability to distinguish whether anything is beautiful.[228] It is this ability *per se* that Kant wants to analyse, and strictly speaking he does not say anything about how art should be: his theme is not 'the rules of art', but rather the attitude of the beholder.[229] What interests Kant is the particular feeling that arises when everything falls into place, when something is 'purposeful without a purpose'. When this occurs, one experiences aesthetic pleasure. What is important in this context is that this state is not something one can decide to have or predict; it occurs in the encounter with the aesthetic object.

The aesthetic feeling is not just any feeling; rather, it has some quite particular characteristics which Kant analyses in detail. An important point for Kant is that the aesthetic judgement is made *without interest*. In Kant's system, interest is the pleasure derived from the existence of an object. Aesthetic pleasure, on the other hand, is related to a purely contemplative attitude. This attitude is important for the universal validity of the judgement, because if the beholder has a specific interest in the object, such as in the form of hunger or desire, the judgement will not be purely aesthetic, but instead will be tainted by this interest. This is the very point Bourdieu criticises. Learning to adopt this attitude of pure contemplation is for him a question of class – the 'uneducated' will, according to Bourdieu, more or less instantly lapse into a way of viewing that is directed by interest. However, if judgement is such an essential aspect of human knowledge, as Kant claims, then all people must have this ability. If the time aspect is considered too, the aesthetic moment may be understood as an aspect in a process that also involves interest: one first enjoys the view of the bowl of fruit without thinking of it as food and, according to Kant, this is actually a necessary stage in the recognition that it *is* food, and then one may well eat the fruit afterwards because these two stages in the process are spread out in time.

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227 Bourdieu 1984.
228 Kant 1951, p. 37.
229 Bourdieu 2000.

The latter point links to another issue raised by Kant, which is that the beautiful is that which *pleases universally without concept*. Here Kant delimits the aesthetic against his theory of knowledge: he states that the aesthetic judgement implies that one dwells in a specific state of uncertainty in relation to *what*, but with certainty in relation to *how*. The aesthetic judgement is thus not a logical judgement, but plays a decisive role in knowledge or the so-called 'theoretical reason' (see the second section of *The Critique of Judgement*). Hence, aesthetic sensibility is a preliminary stage of knowledge, an idea that has been discussed by the philosopher Mark Johnson.[230] The aesthetic must be considered as a first stage in acquiring knowledge, but is not specific knowledge: aesthetic judgement is like a process of acquiring knowledge where one does not reach the final station.

Thus, the discourse about quality will always be an *after-the-fact* activity, a post-rationalisation in the sense that it is not in the social and discursive practice that the quality judgement is made. It has already occurred. But this process does not exclude influence from the social sphere. Even if judgement comes before discourse, judgement also comes *after* a discursive understanding of the aesthetic object: the aesthetic judgement has always already been influenced by the discursive element in the form of materialised historical and cultural underpinnings, in the form of what we might call the spectator's 'habitus', using Bourdieu's term. This contextual influence, however, does not mean that the judgement can be predicted or eliminated by arguments or reason, or by appealing to ethical considerations. The judgement occurs, and subsequently this experience is brought into the social sphere, for example, through discourses about quality.[231] The latter point brings Kant's reflections into contact with the discussion above about values in quality assessments. What may appear as a tension between, on the one hand, a non- or perhaps rather pre-/post-conceptual aesthetic experience and, on the other, a rational discourse are actually stages in the same dynamic. The experience of quality arises before any concepts are brought to bear on it but is simultaneously deeply influenced by the values and concepts of the different genre discourses as they play out pre- and post-experience.

Boundless specialisation versus genre-less generalisation

If one accepts Kant's insights, it is in one sense impossible to predict quality. Each artistic utterance must be experienced before the question of whether

230 Johnson 2007.

231 For an elaborate discussion of musical habitus and the dynamic in the relationship between the aesthetic and the cultural, see for example Danielsen 2006a and Rimmer 2012.

it has artistic quality can be answered. If we then add the insights of cultural sociology regarding the existence of different artistic value systems with different underpinnings for the aesthetic experience to occur, one might end up with an extreme combination of particularism and specialisation. At the extreme, this means that obtaining a competent answer to the question of aesthetic quality requires that any work of art be experienced by a 'receptive' recipient, that is, a recipient with relevant pre-understanding; one must strive for compliance between what can be called the musical habitus and the relevant musical poetics. Thus, only experts on blues can judge in this genre, and they must take a position on each song separately. Since the blues is a genre that emphasises performative qualities, they must actually listen to each performance. Strictly speaking, this is the only way to determine whether the blues performance in question is actually poor (sufficient pre-understanding, relevant aesthetic judgement), excluding the option that the experience of aesthetic quality is absent only due to a lack of aesthetic 'knowledge' of the blues.

This determination is, however, possible only in theory. The number of subfields and specialities is in principle boundless, and having experts listen to each performance would lead to an infinite particularity, which is problematic given the need for cross-comparison. The incommensurability between the different art discourses is thus problematic in practical art and cultural-policy contexts, and at some point one must start to avoid specialisation and overlook the differences. Furthermore, judgements completely free of interest hardly exist. In practice, expertocracy implies power and negotiations about positions in the field: something is included, something is excluded.

Conversely, there is the other extreme: that everything is compared across genres and accompanying differences in musical habitus. Such comparison is also highly problematic. In assembling many different music genres and subjecting them to a common assessment, the risk of incompetent assessments is clearly present. And this problem is bigger than the case of, for example, one erroneous assessment among the many correct ones. Most probably it will lead to specific genres being subjected to *systematic* bias. Those who assess will moreover – and particularly if they are experts in particular fields – probably not be able to see their own blind spots. Some aspects will emerge clearly and some will remain invisible because there is no neutral position where everything is equally visible; there is no position 'outside' where suppressed forms of expression emerge.[232] Typical generalists without special competence would also be problematic because this lack of confidence might lead to a situation where deficient ability and trust in one's own aesthetic understanding would lead to an attempt to calculate what quality is. If one

232 See for example Derrida 1978.

takes Kant's insights deeply to heart, it is not sufficient to measure the aesthetic against a known set of values or criteria. Each case of rule application must be arrived at through experience and accordingly assessed.

Additionally, the aesthetic expression should ideally be assessed when it plays out in its most relevant context, that is, when the music is performed where it belongs, in the way it calls for and for a public that understands it. All these challenges obviously cannot be resolved fully in the way art and cultural policy deal with aesthetic quality. The thoroughly considered compromises are, however, probably better than the ignorant ones: hopefully, the quality assessment will be more valid if one is aware of the challenges and the dilemmas that must be dealt with.

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On quality judgements in art: A conceptual investigation

Simo Säätelä

Introduction: What is quality?

'Quality is something we appreciate', Knut Ove Eliassen remarks in his excellent introduction to the Arts Council Norway's anthology *Kvalitetsforståelser* [Understandings of quality]. But he also asks: 'What is it we actually appreciate? What is quality?'[233] A simple answer to this question is that 'quality' is a common word in our language, a word we mostly use without problems and without needing to reflect on what we are talking about. But if someone asks what quality *is*, and what the word *really* refers to, it is difficult to answer unequivocally. This is certainly the case in a specific cultural policy context. *Quality* has become an important concept in discussions on the value of art and culture, but nevertheless there is heated disagreement about what its content actually is. If art is to receive public funding, we of course want to ensure that funds spent go to art of high quality. However, when attempting to instantiate what this means, we face problems of a philosophical nature: it appears that we often do not know *what* we are actually talking about when we use terms such as 'aesthetic' or 'artistic quality'. In the first pages of the book presenting the 'divining rod model', a Danish model for assessing quality in performative art, the authors point out:

> It will be difficult to find anyone who would dispute that quality in art is important. Many would also agree that it is particularly important that cultural policy should focus on the qualitatively best art. However, when it comes to instantiating what is really meant by artistic quality, people become evasive, and everybody has their own opinion.[234]

233 Eliassen 2016a, p. 7.
234 Langsted, Hannah, and Larsen 2003, p. 9.

Thus, the word 'quality' and the problems it causes recall what Saint Augustine stated about time: 'What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain to a questioner, I do not know'.[235] Ludwig Wittgenstein commented thus on Augustine's dilemma:

> Something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something that we need to *remind* ourselves of. (And it is obviously something of which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself.)[236]

Such a reflection as outlined here by Wittgenstein may contribute to greater awareness of what we are really referring to when we talk about artistic quality, and this is what the present essay proposes to do. Clarification of this concept is not only of philosophical-academic interest. What is at stake is the language we use when discussing value in artistic and cultural-policy contexts, and quality judgements of art may have wide-ranging consequences both for the art and for the artists being assessed.

Methodological background

Which form should a philosophical consideration of the problem take? Indeed, what is a philosophical investigation? There are many answers to these questions, but Wittgenstein gives a concise summary of his own view in his reflection on Augustine's question:

> We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the '*possibilities*' of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena. […] Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one.[237]

Traditionally, philosophical investigations have been understood as metaphysical investigations, that is, examinations attempting to state something true and informative about the *actual* structure of reality: 'to penetrate the phenomena'. Wittgenstein, who is a leading figure in the 'linguistic turn' in recent philosophy, on the other hand, understands philosophical investigations as 'grammatical' or 'conceptual' investigations. Rather than examining

235 Augustine, *Confessions* XI/14, cited in Wittgenstein 1958, § 89.
236 Wittgenstein 1958, § 89.
237 Wittgenstein 1958, § 90, italics in original.

the structure of reality or the phenomena, philosophy is about clarifying the concepts and linguistic expressions we use in our thinking.

Traditional metaphysical philosophy is linked to a specific view of the relationship between language and reality: an answer to a philosophical question of the type 'What is quality?' is expected to lead to knowledge about what quality *really* is, and it should ideally be possible to formulate this knowledge as a real definition which delimits the scope of the concept by stating necessary and sufficient conditions. Recent philosophy often problematises this understanding of language. Wittgenstein asserted that traditional philosophical problems often arise out of linguistic confusion as a result of our tendency to mix concepts and take words out of their ordinary contexts. An example of such confusion is to ask – analogous with the question 'What is time?' – 'What is quality?', thereby assuming that because there is a word 'quality', there must be specific phenomena with real existence corresponding to the word.[238] Thinking through how we actually use language may help us out of this confusion and counteract the philosophical urge to generalise and seek a common 'essence' or 'nature' in the phenomena. Continuing this line of thought, we might say that philosophical investigations are conceptual investigations – they do not deal with the world as a phenomenon but rather with the *concepts* which constitute our understanding of the world. For this reason, I will not examine what the *phenomenon* quality really is with the intention of building a 'metaphysics of quality', but will instead say something about what we mean when we use the word 'quality' (i.e., how we actually understand the *concept* of quality in the assessment of art). The only way to do this is to examine how the word 'quality' is used in various relevant contexts.

What will such an examination show? The first thing we should note is that there are a number of different understandings of quality in use in different fields of art and culture. Eliassen notes that it is important to distinguish between what is meant by the concept within, for example, politics, administration, criticism, universities, academies and artistic practices, and that the concept has different functions in the various contexts. The reason is that 'the semantic core of the concept "quality" is without substance. This means that it is without content; it refers to relational matters. Hence the term can easily be adapted to different types of use.'[239] Eliassen concludes that there are several different concepts of quality, and that it is important to distinguish between them. I generally agree with Eliassen's commendable analysis, but would not go so far as to say that we are therefore dealing with different concepts. Rather we should note that there are both differences and similarities

238 Cf. Eliassen 2016b, p. 187.
239 Eliassen 2016b, p. 199.

in the various ways of using the term 'quality', and that often precisely these differences and similarities cause confusion in our thinking – particularly in a complex field such as art and cultural policy. There thus is a kind of unity in the concept (i.e., a variation of meaning *within* the concept), and the different ways of using it are related to each other. This variety of use explains why we tend to mix together different ways of using the word, and why we tend to assume that the word points out essential common properties in the phenomena we use it to talk about. The urge to generalise does not allow us to see that there exist different kinds of unity in our concepts.

So what kind of unity are we dealing with here? Wittgenstein believes that the temptation to claim that it *must* be possible to delimit a concept precisely can be counteracted by reflecting on *our actual use of language*. The actual use of language shows that in several cases we use the same word *even if* the phenomena the word applies to appear to have unity only in the form of overlapping similarities, and not in the form of common characteristics. But this does not necessarily mean that we are dealing with completely different concepts. Wittgenstein would instead characterise this type of unity as a 'family resemblance'. His famous example is *games*: if we consider our actual use of language, we will find that all the activities we call 'games' do not necessarily have any essential traits in common, but rather relate to each other as members of a family, where A might resemble and have central characteristics in common with B, and B with C, etc., without A therefore needing to resemble or have particularly important features in common with C. 'We see a complex network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.'[240] Wittgenstein introduces the term 'family resemblance' about such a unity that does not allow itself to be reduced to a set of necessary and sufficient characteristics. We may instead say that it is characterised by elements that appear and disappear when we consider the different ways of using the word. In terms of 'games', the elements may, for example, be 'entertainment', 'victory or loss', 'competition', 'skill or luck', etc. Such concepts, Wittgenstein maintains, can be extended 'as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres'.[241] Many mundane concepts such as *tool*, as well as philosophically and scientifically important concepts such as *number, language* and *cause* may be described in this way. Following Wittgenstein's lead, it has moreover been claimed that *art* is such a family-resemblance concept, and that this may explain why traditional philosophy

240 Wittgenstein 1958, § 66.
241 Wittgenstein 1958, § 67.

of art has failed in the task of formulating a definition of the concept that captures the 'essence' of art.[242]

It appears obvious that 'quality' is used in many different ways, particularly in connection with art. It may then be a fruitful working hypothesis to think of quality as a family-resemblance concept. If we consider the diversity of different understandings of and areas of use for 'quality' (in both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective), we may discover precisely 'a complex network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing'.[243] To determine how these different uses constitute our understanding of quality, it is necessary to look at typical cases that come under the concept. The concept of family resemblance must consequently be understood as an analytical instrument we can use in our thinking about what characterises our understanding of the concept *quality* in the sphere of art and culture.

Relative and absolute quality

Which elements will we find if we consider typical cases of different uses of 'quality' in assessing art? Somewhat simplified, we may distinguish between a *relative* and an *absolute* understanding of quality. A typical case for the relative understanding of quality can be found in the production of goods and services, where a product's quality is defined with reference to a certain standard. This understanding of quality is connected to such concepts as *quality control*, *quality assurance* and *benchmarking*, and has gained increasing influence in the culture sector as well.[244] Bearing this in mind, we may consider a contrasting, absolute understanding of 'quality', which occurs particularly in art criticism and discussions about the value of art.[245] Quality in this sense is understood as something unconditional, something that does not arise through comparison with other objects.[246] Hence, we are dealing with an experience of value which is not relative to a set of criteria. Let us now examine these two cases more closely, and see how they relate to each other.

The relative understanding of quality is expressed explicitly in quality definitions such as the ISO 9000 standard. Here 'quality' is defined as the 'degree to which a set of *inherent characteristics* fulfils requirements or *expectations* that are given, normally implicit or obligatory'.[247] We may first note

242 Weitz 1956.
243 Eliassen 2016a and 2016b describe this in a very clear and useful way. See also Liedman 2007.
244 See for example Eliassen 2016a and 2016b; Grøgaard 2016; Strannegård 2007.
245 See Jonvik (2018). Ellefsen (2016, p. 90) asserts that quality 'qua concept' belongs in discussions about critique rather than in practical criticism.
246 See Grøgaard 2016.
247 Gundersen and Halbo 2014 (my italics).

that the definition does not state anything about the extension of the term. Implicitly we are, to be sure, dealing with various types of products. What elements does this definition of 'quality' contain?

First, it states that quality must be established with reference to a 'set of inherent characteristics'. An apple of prime quality must, for example, have a certain size, form, colour, degree of ripeness, and absence of flaws; to satisfy given quality requirements, a couch must be able to pass specified tests, etc.

Second, quality is about *relational* aspects: quality is determined *in relation to* a standard or a set of norms (implicit or obligatory requirements). This standard states *which* 'inherent characteristics' count as criteria for quality (i.e., how products should be compared). The quality criteria in turn become meaningful in relation to requirements or expectations, typically set by the demands of a 'user', namely the product's intended target group.

We should also note that the concept of quality is unclear as to the distinction between fact and value. On the one hand, it has a descriptive element: quality is about the way things are, their nature or specific character. On the other hand, there is also an element of evaluation: quality is about *good* character and *valuable* properties.[248] It is natural to understand quality as an expression of an assessment derived from a comparison (a high-quality object is better than one of low quality). But in the relative sense, 'better' and 'poorer' are understood as *suitability* (i.e., how well a product lends itself to a given purpose). Quality is about whether a product satisfies exactly formulated specifications, and this means that we do not need an individual assessment of it.[249] The quality of the product thus depends on whether it satisfies a set of minimum requirements, which ideally should be possible to express as quantifiable properties. This understanding of quality belongs together with the idea of 'quality assurance', and quality assessment is understood as something factual and 'objective'.[250]

As mentioned, the relative understanding of quality has its origin in the production of goods and services, but it also belongs within the 'neoliberal paradigm' of business, industry and public management, and has gained increasing influence in cultural policy and administration.[251] Eliassen summarises this quantified and 'value-free' concept of quality instructively:

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248 See Gundersen and Halbo 2014.

249 Eliassen 2016b, p. 195.

250 Wittgenstein (2014) asserted it is characteristic of all statements about relative value that they can be analysed as utterances of fact. For a problematisation of this assertion, see Säätelä 2017.

251 See Eliassen 2016b, p. 194. Cf. Liedman 2007 and Strannegård 2007.

> Given that a number of comparable products with differing provenience satisfy a particular standard, production costs may be compared, and the most cost effective may be selected. The procedure does not say anything about the absolute quality of the objects, only about whether they satisfy the specifications of the standard. Thus, quantification is a form of quality assessment which ideally should make the road from *is* to *ought* shorter and less difficult by removing the individual assessment of the product from the evaluation.[252]

The contrast to this concept is an understanding of quality as an assessment of unique objects, not quantifiable or determinable by standardised processes. Quality is not understood as relative to a standard, but as an absolute measure of importance or goodness, as something that must be experienced instead of measured. The 'internal' aesthetic quality discussion in art and culture is often characterised by this absolute understanding of quality.[253] In addition to critics, artists and authors often use 'quality' in such an absolute sense.[254] Let us as an example consider how three high-profile Scandinavian authors express different aspects of an absolute understanding of quality. In his essay 'Kvalitetens usynlege legitimering' [The invisible legitimisation of quality], Jon Fosse writes that what one calls 'quality' does not exist in what is visible, for example, that something is 'well done', but that there is a decisive 'residue' that must 'be sought in what is invisible', and that it is 'this residue that legitimises art'.[255] Stig Larsson, who has often been involved in debates about quality in art, asserts that 'quality is something objective', claiming that 'anyone with an open mind will see, after only forty seconds, what is truly good', adding: 'Needless to say, for this, no university education or other rubbish is needed.'[256] Dag Solstad's description of quality as an 'ultimate instance' also sums up well the view of quality as something absolute. Quality is the measure, and not what is to be measured: '[T]hrough all abuse, consumption and misunderstood use of the concept of quality, and all destructive disagreement about what is quality, the concept of quality looms there, as the ultimate instance we listen to', he writes in his novel *16.07.41*.[257] This 'unmeasurable quality' is experienced directly in a work of art, and it

252 Eliassen 2016b, p. 195, italics in original.
253 Cf. Eliassen 2016a; Grøgaard 2016; Ellefssen 2016; Strannegård 2007.
254 See Jonvik 2018.
255 Fosse 1999, p. 261. This statement is quoted by Jonvik, who also discusses other examples of such a view, where the experience of quality is described as impossible to articulate. In classic aesthetic terminology, this ineffable category is often described as the sublime (see Jonvik (2018)).
256 Larsson 2014, p. 381.
257 Solstad 2003, p. 136. Quoted in Ellefsen 2016, p. 88.

emerges as something incomparable or valuable in itself, and as something difficult or impossible to articulate through concepts, making it meaningless to attempt to formulate quality criteria. [258]

We can see that these two typical cases, that is, the relative and the absolute use of 'quality', appear as diametrically opposed. Let us contrast them in a table to obtain a better overview.

RELATIVE QUALITY	ABSOLUTE QUALITY
Quality is determined according to explicit criteria (ideally formulable as a standard).	Quality is a characteristic we may experience directly in the encounter with the object (cf. Larsson).
Quality consists of the object's inherent characteristics in relation to a set of explicit requirements or expectations.	Quality is determined by a 'quality experience' arising in the encounter between the object and the subject.
Quality criteria are understood as accurately formulable and ideally quantifiable characteristics.	The grounds for quality assessments appear to be 'invisible' or ineffable (cf. Fosse).
Quality is a measure of a product's suitability for a particular purpose.	Quality is understood as something that cannot be measured and as an 'ultimate instance' (cf. Solstad).
The object under assessment is understood as a product, comparable with similar products.	The object under assessment is understood as unique and incomparable.
The element of individual assessment should ideally disappear.	The element of individual assessment is highlighted.
Quality can be assured through 'quality control' and 'quality management'.	Quality cannot be determined or assured.
It is meaningful to use the word 'quality' only in connection with standardised processes or products.	'Quality' is a designation for something unique and valuable in itself.

While the table highlights differences, there is also an underlying relationship between the two ways of understanding quality, which allows us to refer to a 'family resemblance'. Both the relative and the absolute uses of 'quality' contain elements that bind them together, but these are assigned different emphasis. The emphasis in the relative understanding is on the idea that quality is a *relational concept*, and that we can talk about quality only relative to a set of explicit criteria. This element is given less emphasis in the absolute understanding of quality. The concept is still relational, but the emphasis is on the relationship between the object and the subject undertaking the assessment: quality is something that must be *experienced*. In the relative use, this element of *assessment* will be relegated to the background; quality here appears as something completely quantifiable (i.e., determined relative to measurable characteristics). In the absolute use, quality is rather understood as synonymous with *value*.

All in all, the relative use of 'quality', with its emphasis on criteria that can be measured, is at least apparently a more objective and precise use of

258 See Strannegård 2007.

the concept. It is therefore understandable that its influence has grown, even in assessing art, even if its origin is in industrial production. Particularly in a cultural-policy context, concerning resource distribution, it is natural to expect quality assessment to be as transparent and fair as possible, and to expect the criteria to be precisely formulated. For example, quality in art might be defined according to the demands and expectations of an envisioned or real audience.[259] The problem here is that we will then treat art like any standardised product, and that criteria suited for quantification will be emphasised. Thus, relative quality judgements often become an example of what Svein Eng calls 'the escape from the normative statement', which means that value statements are formulated as apparently neutral statements of fact.[260]

Such a relativisation of quality may be criticised for actually trying to avoid mentioning what is specific and important for art as *art*, instead describing art in terms of production of goods or services. Eliassen states that ultimately this 'facilitates the introduction of such terms as "products", "marketing" and "entrepreneurship", that is, perspectives that are not dissimilar to the management model in Feigenbaum's *Total Quality Management*'.[261] It is precisely this perspective which opponents of relative quality assessments in art are unwilling to accept. If works of art are unique and individual, their quality is also absolute.

The debate about artistic quality may often be understood as a conflict between these two understandings of the concept of quality. In a cultural-political perspective, the absolute concept of quality will be perceived as poorly suited to assessing art, as it emphasises individual judgement and the ability to directly see or experience quality in unique objects, while simultaneously highlighting the impossibility of articulating specific quality criteria. Even if Larsson, for example, claims that 'anybody with an open mind' can directly experience artistic quality, it is implicit in this assertion that only the few have what it takes. This kind of understanding of quality in turn opens for arbitrariness and randomness in quality judgements, and hence we lose the very point of introducing this concept in discussing the value of art. The major objection to the absolute concept of quality is that it leads to a kind of elitism and mystification of artistic quality, or alternatively to reducing quality judgements to a question of individual taste. The problem may be summarised as follows: if something 'has quality', it is better than something else, which means that we are comparing similar objects. However, if comparative

259 Cf. Arts Council England 2017.
260 See Eng 1998, Chapter IV.
261 Eliassen 2016b, p. 199. Cf. Strannegård 2007.

criteria cannot be articulated, and quality is understood as an absolute value, which we (or 'those who have eyes to see') can perceive directly in a unique object, judging quality threatens to become a completely subjective assessment that something is good in an unspecified way. If it is impossible to state *why* something is qualitatively better than something else, that is, what the criteria for using the concept are, should one not then refrain from using the word 'quality'?

We obviously cannot prohibit anyone from using 'quality' as an expression of inherent value. But, as Eliassen states, using 'quality' as an 'indeterminate plus word' is a particularly unreflected way of using language. Quality assessment (regardless whether it is relative or absolute) expresses deliberation, and *quality* designates a type of relation or value determined with reference to a set of implied or articulated benchmarks.[262] Also the 'strong' or absolute concept of quality is ultimately used to state that something is particularly good or important *in relation to* something else – otherwise it is meaningless to use precisely this word in the value judgement.

How, then, can we clarify how the concept of quality functions? A well-tested philosophical method is to start by analysing non-complex and trivial examples (here quality assessment of goods or products) and then examine how these relate to examples we perceive as problematic (in this case assessment of artistic quality). This is precisely the approach in J. O. Urmson's classic analysis of 'grading'.

Urmson: 'On grading'

Urmson's philosophical analysis is an example of a particularly non-technical form of 'everyday language philosophy'. Urmson also has links to the so-called speech act theory, where the main point is that certain forms of linguistic utterances can change something in the world, thus being acts just as much as utterances. One of his points is that grading something is not the same as classifying or describing it, because these are different types of acts that have different backgrounds and consequences. By describing and analysing our everyday uncomplicated use of 'grading words', his aim is to state something general about 'the logic of grading'. The example Urmson starts with is grading apples as 'fancy', 'super', or 'extra fancy' quality according to criteria issued by the British Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. This is a typical case of relative use of 'quality', where we have access to unequivocal criteria that are often clearly formulated and expressed in the form of a standard.

262 Eliassen 2016a, p. 8.

From this trivial example Urmson extracts some general points he thinks also apply to cases we experience as more problematic. First, 'grading' is something that requires an *understanding* of what one is doing.[263] Thus we must understand the criteria that the assessment is derived from; we must use 'grading words' correctly. Second, Urmson points out that expertise is often needed to understand the criteria. If I do not know anything about cricket, I cannot rank a person as a good cricket player. Urmson asserts that this need applies quite generally, since we use 'good' as a 'grading label'. Therefore, he claims there is no *logical* difference between saying that someone is a good person and that someone is a good cricketer.[264] In both cases we must refer to criteria. Similarly, applying Urmson's point, we could also claim there is no logical difference between stating that an apple is of high quality and that a work of art is of high quality. If we cannot explain the criteria underlying our assessment, we do not really know what we are talking about. Urmson does of course not deny that we may disagree, particularly when we use general 'grading labels' such as 'good' or 'high quality'. But this is because we disagree either about the criteria themselves or about their application in a given case.

Urmson's main point is thus that the use of 'grading words' in meaningful communication requires that we can agree on criteria: '[G]rading words can only be *used* successfully for communication where the criteria are accepted.'[265] Hence, quality assessment is not an idiosyncratic and random procedure, but rather a rational process. The difference between carrying out a quality assessment and merely stating what one thinks is good or bad is that we in the former case should be able to refer to criteria. In this way, Urmson draws attention to a major problem concerning the use of the word 'quality' in connection with artistic and aesthetic value: the dialogue on quality breaks down if we cannot agree on criteria. One problem may be that we assume different sets of criteria, and that, for example, the criterion for quality in a cultural-political context (say, 'relevance') is not counted as a criterion of artistic quality. Another problem may be that criteria we use are very vague or implicit, and we therefore disagree whether they cover a given case. If Urmson's diagnosis is correct, it explains some of the problems we have when using the word 'quality' in assessing art. Criteria that have been proposed for assessing artistic value theoretically (e.g., 'unity in diversity'), or proposed by critics referring to them in practice (e.g., 'originality', 'generosity', 'credibility', 'independence', 'complexity'), are so vague and ambiguous

263 Urmson 1950, p. 147.
264 Urmson 1950, p. 168.
265 Urmson 1950, p. 167.

that agreement on such criteria on a nominal level does not guarantee agreement in specific cases.[266]

Therefore, Urmson would say that we are actually abusing the word 'quality' if we use it in an 'absolute' sense and are unable to refer to criteria. But here we also see the limitations of Urmson's otherwise admirable analysis. Clearly, the discussion about quality will become problematic if we cannot agree on criteria, but it may still be hasty to dismiss the absolute use of 'quality' simply because it does not fit into the analysis of 'grading words'. We should rather see this problem as encouragement to regard the issue from another perspective that does not place as much emphasis on agreeing about criteria. Here, David Hume's classic analysis of aesthetic judgements of taste may help us – Hume in fact shows us how we can make meaningful judgements, even when it is difficult or impossible to reach agreement on criteria.

Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste'

At the start of his classic essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' from 1757, Hume raises the problem I discussed above, that is, disagreement concerning the use of explicit criteria when assessing art:

> There are certain terms in every language, which import blame, and others praise; and all men, who use the same tongue, must agree in their application of them. Every voice is united in applauding elegance, propriety, simplicity, spirit in writing; and in blaming fustian, affectation, coldness and a false brilliancy: But when critics come to particulars, this seeming unanimity vanishes; and it is found, that they had affixed a very different meaning to their expressions.[267]

But Hume wants to proceed further and show that, this disagreement notwithstanding, we may find a standard that allows us to compare different critical judgements. Hume's standard of taste refers both to the possibility of establishing a common benchmark for individual experiences of principally unique objects, and to how this standard is valid for those who experience the objects.[268]

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266 Jonvik (2018) mentions these characteristics as criteria that are implicitly or explicitly referred to by critics in quality judgments.

267 Hume 1987, § 2.

268 Eliassen 2016b, p. 194. Eliassen also notes that in his essay Hume goes a long way towards 'establishing the basis for the philosophical understanding of aesthetic quality up to our time'. Hume's relevance today is evident from the fact that his essay has been the object of a wide-ranging discussion in recent philosophical aesthetics (see Gracyk 2016).

Hume's terminology is anchored in eighteenth-century philosophical debates on art, taste and beauty, and might therefore strike us as antiquated, but the problem he outlines, and his proposed solution, can still be relevantly transferred to our contemporary situation. I established above that relative judgements of quality apparently give a more objective point of departure for discussing value in art than judgements of absolute quality, which at first glance are based *entirely* on individual judgement and taste and do not refer to explicitly formulated and measurable quality criteria. This dichotomy has many similarities with the philosophical discussion of beauty and taste, as it was *developed* by the classical proponents of philosophical aesthetics (first and foremost Kant and Hume) in the eighteenth century: Is beauty something objective, that is, a property of objects, or only a projection of the subject's emotions? Hume believes, in accordance with his fundamental empiricism, that beauty, or aesthetic value, cannot be an inherent property of objects. Instead, beauty must be compared to 'secondary' properties, such as sweetness or bitterness, which do not exist in the things themselves, but are attributed by the mind to an object perceived. Aesthetic judgements are judgements of taste derived from a specific experience that we may have when encountering an object. It is then tempting to draw the following conclusion: 'Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.'[269] This conclusion means that an object's beauty is found only in the subject's perception of it – if I perceive something as beautiful, it is beautiful *for me*, but if you do not have a similar experience, it is not beautiful *for you*. Thus, aesthetic judgement has nothing to do with rationality. We cannot use reason to arrive at the conclusion that something is beautiful, or argue for its beauty on the basis of objective rules or principles.

One might perhaps believe that Hume, who was a self-declared sceptic, would adopt such a view, which implies that it is impossible to speak about correct or erroneous taste judgements. But he attempts instead to defuse the debate between subjectivism and objectivism by showing there actually is a standard at work in the aesthetic field, even if aesthetic judgements are judgements of taste. Hume points out that it is 'natural for us' to seek a standard that allows us to determine which judgements are expressions of good or poor taste:

> Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high

269 Hume 1987, § 8.

> as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous.[270]

Hume thus implies that we often view a difference in artistic value as a *fact* even if we ultimately are dealing with aesthetic judgements of taste. We say that Milton *is* a better author than Ogilby, Rembrandt *is* a better painter than Odd Nerdrum, Bergman *is* a better film director than Kieslowski, etc. Thus, we in fact distinguish between good and bad taste, between correct and incorrect judgements of taste, and hence between good and bad critics. In other words, even if Hume concentrates on the concepts *beauty* and *taste* in accordance with eighteenth-century aesthetics, what he is discussing is clearly comparable with artistic quality because he is interested in the judgement and ranking of art rather than in the impressions or sentiments that belong to our experience of individual works of art. The point of 'the standard of taste' is that it gives our evaluation of art a kind of objectivity that judgements of taste lack. It tells us which aesthetic judgements we *should* accept as exemplary. But this normativity cannot be based on criteria relating to inherent properties in the objects. The standard instead allows us to make decisions when it comes to *critical judgements* of art. When Hume refers to 'criticism' and 'critics', these references are to be understood in a wide sense: he does not mean only the group of art critics proper, but *everyone* who formulates judgements on the value of art. This understanding is in accordance with the fact that 'criticism' etymologically stems from the Greek word κρινειν [*krinein*] ('distinguish', 'decide', 'judge'). A *good* critic thus can distinguish between what is good and what is inferior.

Hume uses 'taste' and 'judgement of taste' in a far wider sense than what is common in our time. In fact, Hume believes that we trust our taste, but not our reason, both when judging a work of art's aesthetic value and when judging an action's moral value. It is taste which 'gives the sentiments of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue'.[271] Hence taste is the foundation for both moral and art criticism. According to Hume, this means we cannot accept an extreme aesthetic subjectivism or relativism, but must acknowledge that there is a standard operative in the aesthetic field. This leads us to Hume's first question: Where can we find this standard?

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270 Hume 1987, § 9.
271 Hume 1777, M. App. 1.21, p. 294.

Where can we find a standard for artistic quality?

Hume stresses that the standard for quality assessments in art is a standard of *taste,* which is established in or with the audience in their encounters with works of art.[272] This means that the question of normativity is transposed from criteria (understood as specific properties of the work of art) to the question of *who* is competent to assess or rank inherently unique objects. Hume generally claims that normative conflict (regardless of whether it pertains to aesthetics or morals) can be solved only by referring to a well-informed, neutral and general position. The requirement for a correct assessment is 'that much reasoning must precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained'.[273] The essay on taste defends this viewpoint and attempts to describe the requirements for a critic to assume such an attitude, which is necessary if we are to speak of a normative *standard* and not merely a number of arbitrary individual judgements of taste.

Hume emphasises that only a few individuals have a well-*developed* taste. Not just anybody can elevate their taste judgement to a standard, or make authoritative statements on artistic quality. Regarding 'mental' taste, which Hume distinguishes from 'physiological' taste, having a good sense of taste (i.e., the ability to distinguish different qualities) is not sufficient in itself. A 'true critic' must also satisfy the conditions already mentioned: he or she must be able to reason, make distinctions and comparisons, perceive complex relationships and draw fact-based conclusions. True criticism is, consequently, an activity which demands reflection and is based on knowledge about the object of criticism. This account of criticism explains why we can find a standard of taste. Hume envisions an *ideal critic* whom we can refer to when making decisions about critical disagreements, and he sums up the criteria for 'a true judge in the finer arts' thus:

> Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and *the joint verdict of such*, wherever they are to be found, is *the true standard of taste and beauty*.[274]

The standard is hence established by individuals who react with sensitivity to a work of art and who *additionally* have sufficient knowledge and practice

272 Cf. Eliassen 2016b, p. 195.
273 Hume 1777, 1:9, p. 173.
274 Hume 1987, § 24. My italics.

to be able to make statements about the work and an ability to express their experiences (i.e., engage in art criticism).

Hume's characterisation of these 'true judges' is much debated.[275] On a general level, his solution has been criticised for being circular: the works recognised by the ideal critics are the valuable works of art, but the ideal critics are simultaneously identified by the fact that they recognise the valuable works of art. Hume bypasses this circularity by claiming that the true judges can be identified by their compliance with the five criteria quoted above. However, this in turn threatens to lead to a regress because we now must be able to determine whether a given person has *sufficiently* fine-tuned taste, *adequate* experience, is able to make the *correct* comparisons, etc. Hume dismisses this problem by stating that in practice it is not difficult to recognise persons who should be accepted as true judges of taste, even if it may be impossible to tell exactly how we distinguish them from bad critics. He believes 'it is sufficient for our present purpose, if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing, and that some men in general, however difficult to be particularly pitched upon, will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others'.[276] Here we must concede that Hume is right: in practice, not everyone can make statements about artistic quality. A certain position in the 'world of art' is required if a person's judgements are to enjoy authority. Even if in practice it is difficult to indicate specifically whom one may consider to be 'ideal critics', and who *should* have this authority, we must trust that selection mechanisms of art institutions can do so.

Hume allows that there is variation in taste even amongst 'true judges', but this variation does not mean that it is impossible to establish a standard of taste. He proposes a further argument to show that there actually is a standard for artistic quality. This is often called 'the test of time': within each art form there are a number of works, which have been assessed as exemplary through time (i.e., classics, or what we could call a canon of works). Hume mentions the works of Homer as an example of something that has 'survived all the caprices of mode and fashion, all the mistakes of ignorance and envy', and which awaken 'durable admiration'.[277] According to Hume, it is the joint verdict of the true judges that establishes a canon representing 'universal beauty', a canon which is more or less independent of cultural and historical variation. Even if Hume speaks of a standard of *taste*, that is, relates

275 See Gracyk 2016 for a summary of this criticism.
276 Hume 1987, § 26.
277 Hume 1987, § 11. We may note a certain similarity with Solstad's way of characterising quality; see footnote 180.

the standard to sensations of taste in individuals, it is nevertheless concretely expressed in a canon of exemplary works. Ultimately, it is the existence of such a canon that distinguishes 'mental' from 'physiological' taste, and which is required if 'mental' taste is to lay claim to a special type of objectivity.

Even if we accept Hume's view that there is a standard of quality operative in the arts, and that this standard is established in selected parts of a critical audience, a second question still remains: *How does this standard have validity for those who experience the objects*? This is occasionally called Hume's 'real problem'.[278]

Why should we accept the standard as valid?

There is broad discussion about whether Hume in fact can present a valid solution to the question of the standard's validity. Basically, Hume's problem is the transition from 'is' to 'ought': Given that we have a group of selected critics who establish a 'standard of taste' – why *should* we accept this as a norm? Does this not conflict with Hume's empirical point of departure? Hume's way of attributing the establishment of standards to a selected part of the critical audience has especially come under attack from an influential tradition in art criticism and cultural studies which would prefer to place taste in a social context. The argument goes like this: Hume may be right, so far, that there is a *de facto* 'standard' in art and culture, which distinguishes good from bad or from vulgar taste. However, this standard is not a valid norm that can tell us about *real* differences in value or quality. Instead, it represents the taste ideal of an elite. Hume is thus attempting to falsely imbue the 'standard', which in reality is controlled by ideological interests, with validity. Borrowing Richard Shusterman's witty formulation, we may call this 'the scandal of taste': the taste of a privileged group is elevated to a 'natural', 'true' and generally valid normative standard.[279] This type of 'social criticism of taste', which has been especially formulated by Pierre Bourdieu and his followers, implies a 'sociologisation' of value issues: what is valuable is what appeals to a particular group of people with the power of definition. Hence judgements of 'artistic quality' also become something that exclusively has to do with cultural capital and social power relations. Similarly, the canon which Hume believes provides a common background for quality judgements will also be perceived as ideological and based on hidden interests rather than on genuine artistic values (cf. 'the canon wars'). The result is ultimately aesthetic

278 Cf. Levinson 2002.
279 Shusterman 1989.

value relativism: we can speak of artistic quality only in relation to the (arbitrary and varying) taste of a cultural elite.

Clearly, Hume's view of the standard of taste implies a kind of elitism. His point of departure is simply that taste is not democratic and that 'few are qualified to give judgement on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty'.[280] According to Hume, it is a fact that people in general find pleasure in aesthetically uninteresting works because they 'judge without any distinction'. The best critics are those having a 'correct perception' of works of art, and therefore these critics' choices and judgements may also guide us.[281] But what makes these judgements correct and not merely an expression of what a given group likes or dislikes? In answer to this question, it may help to understand Hume's standard not as an empirical explanation of taste as a social phenomenon, but as an attempt to say something about the *conditions of possibility* for assessing art at all. If so, we should read Hume's essay as an explanation of how we can *give grounds* for a standard or norm for what is *good or bad*. The standard of taste is therefore about differences in value, and not about *liking* or *not liking* something.

An important point in such a reading is that Hume does not attempt to tell us something *new* about critical assessment of art – he does not try to tell us what criticism really is, or to give a completely new rationale for practicing it. Instead, he wishes to show how the critical practice we *have* in the arts is normative, and how we *really* make decisions about artistic value. We assume it as a *fact* that there are judgements about artistic quality that are better than others, Hume maintains, and it is this normativity he aims to explain. Hence, some aesthetic judgements are justified; we may refer to correct and incorrect judgements and to poor and good taste. It is important to note that Hume, when referring to 'mental' taste, does not primarily mean individual judgements of taste. Since aesthetic judgements are not based on properties of objects, but on sentiment, the standard of taste cannot give us criteria for deciding whether an individual aesthetic experience in itself is more valuable than another. Instead, the standard must be understood as the background that enables us to refer to more or less correct experiences and correct or incorrect judgements.[282] Thus even if Hume assumes that taste is

280 Hume 1987, § 24.
281 Ibid.
282 This point is highlighted by Burnham and Skilleås 2012, p. 142. It is also in accordance with Ellefsen's (2016, pp. 85–86) claim that the experience of literary quality is a 'second-order experience', 'which is occasioned by our encounter with for example stylistic features in the text, the narrative's ability to stimulate the reader's imagination or the attractive power of the characters in the novel, but which is also contingent on the individual reader's receptivity, knowledge and state of mind'.

physiologically anchored and ultimately subjective, he maintains that 'mental' taste raises itself above the purely physiological.

Elisa Galgut, who has *developed* this type of reading of Hume, believes that the existence of ideal critics is the solution to the question of how the standard can be normative even though aesthetic judgements ultimately are based on individual emotions. Hume's 'true judges' operate within an existing aesthetic standard, but they also contribute to forming it. In other words, their common judgements will both *constitute* and *reinforce* a standard of taste. The judgements of the ideal critics become normative 'through the cultural practice of criticism and art-making; for not only do the critics work *within* an already existing artistic tradition […] but they also assist in constituting and developing this tradition'.[283] As participants in such a tradition, we already have a 'pre-understanding' of which works are 'masterworks', and this is what Hume's ideal critics build on. The ideal critics can point out works with high artistic value, but their common judgements then also provide a standard that can be used as a benchmark for aesthetic judgements in general. The tradition is both a backdrop against which critical assessments are made, and a condition of possibility for critical practice.

Hume's 'ideal critics', according to Galgut, have a dual role in relation to the standard of taste: they both establish a standard, and can 'point us lesser critics in its direction'.[284] We can recall that Hume speaks about both 'critics' and 'true judges' when referring to the people we have designated 'ideal critics'. Galgut's main point is that we must take this analogy between critics and judges seriously, and compare the role of the critics as judges with the role judges have in certain common law traditions (i.e., in a legal system based on precedent). In such a system, some court decisions become norms for similar cases, and judges, through their practice, are the ones who determine which similarities and differences are relevant and should be given emphasis in each case. This may serve as a model for how the judgements of ideal critics establish a standard. As I pointed out, Hume claims that the critical activity primarily has to do with judgement, not individual preferences of taste. Therefore, Hume attaches much importance to the special backgrounds and competencies of the 'true judges', emphasising that taste and fine-tuned sensitivity are not sufficient. An ideal critic also needs practice, knowledge, etc., that is, an ability to place his or her activity and judgements in a tradition, even if the intention is to object to or deviate from this tradition. The true judge of taste and the judge in court must both have special competence, and they work within an existing tradition, which they simultaneously contribute

283 Galgut 2012, p. 188 (italics in original).
284 Galgut 2012, p. 184.

to shaping and developing. Furthermore, a person must be recognised as a judge in the legal system if his or her judgements are to have binding force, and similarly, a critic must be recognised by 'the art world' and the community of critics. Thus, even if no definitive criteria are found for someone to be an 'ideal critic', there are generally accepted practices through which critics can achieve recognition.[285] An important characteristic of 'ideal critics', which is not explicitly highlighted by Hume, is a critic's communicative ability (i.e., an ability to formulate his or her experiences and guide others to such experiences).[286] The conclusion is that the very possibility of assessing art, and of speaking about high or low quality, requires the existence of a critical and artistic tradition. Only those able to place their judgements in relation to this tradition can have authority in their quality judgements.

This reading of Hume is in line with the anti-essentialist perspective I presented in the introduction to this article. We do not need to assume any essential common characteristics in the works recognised as good by the ideal critics. Nor do we need to assume that the ideal critics constitute an elite who do not really have anything in common with 'ordinary critics'. This perspective on the standard of taste is therefore also compatible with an 'institutional-contextual' understanding of art and quality rather than with an 'aesthetic-essential' one.[287] According to this reading, objective assessment becomes *possible* through the existence of a standard, and Hume offers a picture of what kind of objectivity we may meaningfully assume when judging art. It also attaches importance to how the role of 'the ideal critics' as experts is based on our *trust* in them.[288] We do not trust them because they *know* more than we do about art, but because they can *show us the way* to valuable aesthetic experiences.

Is a standard by its nature conservative?

The understanding of the standard of taste as a condition for the possibility of assessing art emphasises the activities of the 'the true judges' and relates these to a canon of acknowledged works. But as Foucault and other critical thinkers are not hesitant to point out, such norms work by excluding what

285 How have, for example, the critics whom Jonvik deals with in her article achieved recognition in their field? Obviously first and foremost through their activities as critics. Whether they are 'ideal critics' in Hume's sense is a question which must be left open (See Jonvik 2018).

286 Burnham and Skilleås 2012, p. 167.

287 See Vilks 2007. See also Jonvik 2018.

288 Burnham and Skilleås (2012, pp. 165–171) emphasise particularly this aspect of our relationship to potential 'ideal critics'.

does not fit within the norm or standard. Does this not mean that a Humean standard of taste automatically excludes deviant and innovative works?

I can here outline only a brief response to this kind of criticism. When Hume emphasises works that have passed the test of time, he is referring to masterworks recognised as exemplary expressions of artistic quality. These are works that have broad appeal in the sense that 'everyone' is familiar with them, and all those who have a reasonably serious interest can appreciate them on a certain level. But how does this canon relate to the standard of taste? Is it the canon in itself which is the standard? If so, does this mean that in reality an innovative work of art cannot be recognised as good if it deviates radically from the canon?

In an influential article, Jerrold Levinson endeavours to answer this type of critical objection to Hume. He admits that *if* the standard were the recognised masterworks, then all works deviating from the canon would need to be judged as deficient. According to Levinson, Hume avoids this conclusion by placing the standard with the ideal critics, not with the canon (i.e., the recognised works *as such*). The masterworks are unique and innovative, and valuable in various ways, but cannot, precisely because of this variation, contain unequivocal criteria for artistic quality. The point is, on the other hand, that we have a reason to accept judgements of ideal critics as a standard because they are competent to guide us towards the most artistically valuable works, that is, the works which may give us rewarding aesthetic experiences. But the ideal critics can do this precisely through their special relationship to the recognised masterworks. Because they can distinguish the qualities that make a given work good, and can understand how the work's properties contribute to this value, we *should* care about what they have to say about other works of art. We can trust that they can demonstrate how a given work has qualities similar to those of recognised masterworks (bearing in mind that the ability to make comparisons was one of the criteria identifying Hume's 'ideal critic').[289] We may say that the masterworks do not function as a benchmark for artistic quality by being norms for artistic creativity, but rather by 'influencing the evaluations and honing the appreciative abilities of ideal critics'.[290]

Conclusion

Let us now consider an objection that arises: Does not Hume's explanation essentially mean that artistic quality can be determined by referring to a small elite of art experts? In fact, we have little choice but to respond

289 Levinson 2002, p. 233.
290 Burnham and Skilleås 2012, p. 158.

affirmatively, but this *is* the only real alternative to nihilism regarding artistic quality. Objectivity in quality judgements is based on the existence of 'ideal critics' who make decisions we can acknowledge as guiding us toward valuable experiences. Thus, we must trust that these critics *are able to* perceive something valuable (i.e., that their judgements are reliable). This trust demands in the first place that we have something in common with the expert critics: they are actually not an elite with experiences that are unattainable for us 'ordinary people'. Second, it is important that these experts can guide us, that they can communicate their experiences and can support them through their descriptions of the object. If a critic does not do this, his or her assessments threaten to be nothing more than unfounded oracular statements maintaining that something 'has quality' in a quite undetermined way, instead of being *instructive* expert statements.[291]

This is where a more explicit discussion about the basis of quality assessments can in fact be useful: We want quality judgements to refer to criteria, but we cannot demand exact and generally valid criteria for artistic quality.[292] Hence it is the *discussion about quality* rather than *agreement about criteria* which is the goal for reflection on artistic quality. As pointed out by Bernhard Ellefsen, these discussions are important, even if the concept of quality *per se* should perhaps best be understood as a kind of '*gesture* that points towards one aspect of engaging intellectually and emotionally' in art.[293] As we in this context are most often dealing with an 'absolute' use of 'quality', it is important who makes the utterances, and on which terms. Some of the discussions will therefore be about who should be accepted as an expert judge (i.e., who should have the authority to judge artistic quality, and whom we may trust as experts). These questions have no set answer, but in Hume's words, it is in 'general acceptation' that certain people are commonly considered to be more prominent critics than others, 'however difficult to be particularly pitched upon'.[294]

One conclusion may be that the term 'quality' is not useless when assessing art, but that we must remain aware of what we are talking about, and of why we want to use the term in various contexts. A fundamental point here is the ability to resist the temptation to assume that 'quality' means the same

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291 Compare how Ellefsen (2016) attaches importance to how literary quality cannot be verified or proved, but that the critic who is able to persuade the interested and serious reader ultimately is the one who is 'right'.

292 Jonvik's article 'Eit fuktig såpestykke' in *Kvalitetsforshandlinger* (2018) shows how a group of recognised critics in literature and art look at their own activities in a way that is in accordance with this claim.

293 Ellefsen 2016, p. 101 (italics in original).

294 Hume 1987, § 26.

in all contexts. We must accept that it is impossible to determine exactly formulated criteria for artistic quality that would render the judgement of quality independent of *who* is making the assessment. Instead, we must trust the judgements of experts and competent persons, that is, those who ideally have the characteristics Hume demands of 'true judges'. In practice, this is a defence of the arm's-length principle: Only art institutions can determine who is competent to make statements about artistic quality.

Regarding the objection that this is undemocratic, the only response may be that art is not about democracy.[295] Clearly, such an 'expertocracy' may be perceived as an opaque and potentially unfair source for quality assessments. But we must bear in mind that the expertise does not base itself on infallibility in individual judgements, or on the argument that 'ideal critics' would have experiences others may never have, and that we must therefore accept their judgements. The very point of talking about ideal critics is rather that there is reason to trust the competence of experts. Trust is normally not a given, but is something that must be earned through performance. The ideal critics must thus be able to connect their judgements with the experiences and the understanding we 'ordinary critics' have.

Ultimately, the very possibility of making quality judgements in art assumes a more or less common value basis, meaning, for example, that as members of a common culture we take it for granted that aesthetic experiences are valuable, *and* that we can gain such valuable experiences from art. Furthermore, we trust that certain experts can point us towards these experiences, meaning that we have a kind of aesthetic community we believe it is valuable to participate in.[296] It is within such a 'pre-understanding' that we can have a normative standard at all, and thus a possibility of talking about artistic quality.

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Measuring the quality and impact of arts and culture

Trine Bille and Flemming Olsen

Introduction

Arts and culture (i.e., theatre, film, music, visual art, literature, cultural heritage, etc. and related institutions and participants) have traditionally not been measured and evaluated in the same way as other sectors. The reason is perhaps that arts and culture cannot be 'weighed and measured': it is difficult to assess quality, and it has been difficult to see how, and according to what criteria, the quality, value and impact of arts and culture can be measured.[297] There has therefore been a reluctance to conduct such measurements, and 'evaluations' in the field have mostly been limited to analysing the content and aesthetics of individual works of art from a humanities perspective.

However, when public funds are involved, for example in the form of subsidies for cultural institutions and projects, it can be desirable to investigate the outcomes. The question is whether the public funds are used most effectively in relation to achieving the desired goals, or to put it simply, whether society gets the best and most arts and culture for its money – and thereby the best quality (whatever that might be).

Our whole society is saturated with quality and impact measurements. The education sector, for example, has the PISA surveys that enable us to measure the quality and impact of teaching and to compare our education system with other countries' education systems. The New Public Management trend in the public sector, including the widespread use of

297 A distinction should always be drawn between arts and culture. However, since this article does not deal with particular forms of art or culture, the broad phrase 'arts and culture' will be used throughout.

performance-based contracts, even by cultural institutions, has reinforced this development.[298]

When discussing measurements in the arts and culture field, we must first be aware of fundamental problems associated with assessing *artistic quality*. The arts critics have debated this issue for centuries without managing to agree on an unambiguous definition or clear criteria. Moreover, artistic quality is usually only one of several important factors when assessing a cultural institution or project. Other cultural policy goals exist, for example, reaching a wider audience and attracting new audience segments. Regarding *impact*, major difficulties also exist in measuring and analysing what arts and culture do to people, that is, what impact arts and culture have, and in measuring and analysing what this impact means to society. Finally, there is the financial aspect. When prioritising is necessary, there must be some way of measuring whether the value or impact of an institution or a project justifies the costs. This aspect makes particular demands of measurement or evaluation methods.

Measurements are particularly challenging in the cultural field, but given economic pressures, the arts and culture field, being unable to quantify how it benefits society, risks losing out to the big-spending welfare areas, such as child welfare and education, care of the elderly and employment.

The growing interest in quality and impact measurements in the arts and culture field has, among other things, resulted in two extensive studies, namely 'The Public Value Measurement Framework – Measuring the Quality of the Arts' (2014), which was developed in Australia, and 'Quality Metrics – Measuring Quality in the Cultural Sector', developed in Manchester and continued and further developed by Arts Council England.[299] With administrative purposes in mind, these two projects have developed different indicators for measuring the quality and impacts of arts and culture. In this article, we will take a closer look at these two studies: How and in what situations are arts and culture assessed, what criteria are used, and how are assessments expressed?

The object of this article is to elucidate and discuss possibilities for measuring and operationalising quality and impacts, taking the two studies from Australia and England as our point of departure. What can we learn from research about operationalising the concept of quality and measuring impacts? What consequences can these measurements potentially have for how we think about quality and for how arts and culture are administered and funded? What are the cultural policy implications?

298 Bille 2004.
299 Bunting and Knell 2014 and Knell and Whitaker 2016.

The article's structure is as follows: Section 2 begins with a discussion of different understandings of quality as they apply to *artistic quality*, and different attempts to measure and operationalise the concept. On the basis of this discussion, section 3 scrutinises the two selected extensive studies of quality and impact measurements from Australia and England, respectively. Section 4 contains a critical discussion of these studies. In section 5, we turn our attention to the measurement of *impacts*, and we argue that it is more relevant to measure impact than to measure quality. The article concludes and puts things into perspective through a discussion of the cultural policy implications of the types of measurements the two studies represent, and makes suggestions for further research.

Understandings of quality and operationalisation

In this section, we discuss different understandings of quality, including different ways of operationalising the concept of quality and what opportunities and problems arise when attempting to measure artistic quality. Is quality a concept that even has sufficient theoretical substance and potential to be useful in operationalising real cultural policy issues?

Quality has long been an important concept in the arts and culture field, but the meaning of 'quality' is unclear.[300] At the overarching philosophical level, there is disagreement between two opposing views – between artistic quality as something 'inherent', an intrinsic quality of a work of art, and as something defined by social factors and belonging in the realm of art's social context; see the institutional theory of art.[301] Or do both viewpoints have merit?

Søren Kjørup describes four conceptions of artistic quality:

- The objective understanding: Artistic quality consists of specific qualities possessed by a work of art.
- The instrumental understanding: Quality is a characteristic of the work of art, but the focus is on what the work elicits, typically an aesthetic experience in the viewer, but quality could also be the ability to impart important truths or moral lessons in a striking manner.
- The psychological understanding: Artistic quality is not a characteristic of the work of art, but arises from its effect on people who experience it.
- The sociological understanding: Artistic quality is 'for someone', that is, artistic quality is synonymous with large or small groups of people

300 Eliassen 2016.
301 See, for example, Kjørup 2000 and Dickie 1974.

> appreciating a work of art, and the focus is on how people who experience the work of art act. This understanding focuses not on what people experience, but on what they do.[302]

In the following, we discuss examples of measurement and measuring methods within three stylised understandings of quality, namely:

- quality = objective characteristics of a work of art
- quality = the art world's understanding (the institutional theory)
- quality = the viewer's understanding (the instrumental and psychological understanding)

According to the *objective understanding of quality*, artistic quality consists of specific characteristics of a work of art. That is, works of art have a universal inherent value, an intrinsic value independent of the viewer's opinion. Throughout history, attempts have been made to operationalise and measure this objective quality.

Roger de Piles's work is an early example of an attempt to objectively measure the quality of art.[303] He was a French philosopher who was responsible for purchasing works of art for the court of Louis XIV. He invented a system whereby works of art could be given marks on a scale from 1 to 18 for composition, drawing, colour and expression. By applying this system he concluded, for example, that Rafael was a better painter than both Rembrandt and Michelangelo.

Figure 1. Roger de Piles's quality assessment system

	COMPOSITION	DRAWING	COLOUR	EXPRESSION
Raphael	17	18	12	18
Rubens	18	13	17	17
Rembrandt	15	6	17	12
Leonardo da Vinci	15	16	4	14
Michelangelo	8	17	4	8

Source: Piles 1708.

A more recent example is Favrholdt's parameter theory, which gave rise to a great deal of debate in Denmark in the early 2000s.[304] Favrholdt's point

302 Kjørup 1997, 2000.
303 Piles 1708.
304 Favrholdt 2000.

of departure is that a theory of art, or a definition of what art is, must start with the work of art itself. With his parameter theory, Favrholdt wanted to confront institutional theory, which holds that an object is art if the art world acknowledges it as art. In Favrholdt's opinion, a work of art has special characteristics that can be formulated. Moreover, they can vary in strength, which makes these characteristics parameters. Favrholdt's parameters are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Favrholdt's parameters

PARAMETER	EXPLANATION
Integration	The interaction between the parts of a whole
Diversity or complexity	The number of elements that interact
Technique	The technical skills, which should be relatively invisible, and how they relate to the idea and personal expression
Aesthetic/beauty qualities	The aesthetic/beauty aspect of the artistic experience
Personal imprint	The impression of being man-made, which shows that the work is the product of human consciousness
Repeatability	Artistic experiences that are equally good in every instance
Intellectual appeal	The ideas expressed in the work of art
Emotional appeal	The emotional effects
Other suggestive qualities	For example, ugliness as an aesthetic device
The inexplicable message	The indescribable message that by nature transcends language

Sources: Favrholdt 2000 and Hagen 2002.

The idea is that a scale can be developed, for example from 1 to 10, by which a work of art can be assessed in relation to each of the ten parameters listed. A work need not achieve a high score on all parameters to be a high-quality work of art. However, by using the total score, a ranking can be agreed, whereby low-ranked works must be considered non-art. The next ranges can for example designate sound craftsmanship with certain artistic qualities, art and great art, respectively.[305]

Favrholdt's parameter theory met great resistance and gave rise to heated debate in Denmark. Jimmy Zander Hagen described as follows the two main reasons Favrholdt's theory was almost universally rejected:

> Firstly, history shows that works originally regarded as non-art often later win recognition as art. Thus, there is reason to doubt whether Favrholdt's universal theory of art will bring this constant state of flux to an end in

305 Hagen 2002.

> 2000. In other words: Since art is a dynamic process through which new forms of expression evolve, it will mean the death of art to define it on the basis of concepts from the past. Secondly, scoring individual works of art in relation to the ten parameters would be completely subjective. A work that Favrholdt would award zero points for emotional appeal could be awarded 10 points by someone else, etc. Thus, to objectively determine the value of a work of art is impossible.[306]

This quote expresses two crucial points: Firstly, art is dynamic and therefore cannot be evaluated using static parameters. Secondly, even when artistic quality is evaluated by specialists and art experts, their opinions often differ. Therefore, institutional theory has far more support.

Briefly put, *institutional theory* states that an object is art if acknowledged as such by the art world.[307] This theory's strong point is that it can accommodate the great changes that characterise modern art. The theory can thus also accommodate future concepts of art and thereby the dynamics of art. Therefore, a widely held view is that only the art world itself (i.e., the experts) can assess artistic quality. Expertise in matters of art is required to assess its quality. Objective quality measurement may not be possible, but, in certain contexts, expert statements are deemed to be close to objective, at least concerning the craftsmanship's quality. Art critics are often regarded as experts. The institutional theory is also reflected in how arm's-length bodies such as the Danish Art Foundation and corresponding bodies in other countries are organised. In these bodies, artists and other representatives of the art world evaluate the quality of art when works of art are purchased and grants awarded. In other words, the arm's-length principle builds on institutional theory. However, it is well known that experts often disagree, and a work of art, an exhibition or a theatre production can often be reviewed very differently by different experts, without such different reviews necessarily being considered a problem.[308] Although it may be possible to make a more objective assessment, for example of the quality of the craftsmanship, quality is – at least to a certain extent – a subjective matter.

In his book *Ønskekvistmodellen* [*The Dowser Model*] Jørn Langsted takes the intermediate position, 'that quality is both an intrinsic characteristic of art and something that is ascribed to art. It is thus possible, at a certain level of abstraction, to analyse quality in art without just expressing one's personal opinions. The premises for an encounter with a work of art are defined both

306 Hagen 2002 (author's translation).
307 Dickie 1974.
308 Bille and Baldin 2017.

by the work of art itself and by the person who experiences it'.[309] It also follows that quality in art cannot be reduced to perceived quality alone. It is therefore impossible to determine whether art is qualitatively good simply by asking the audience and then comparing their expectations with their experiences.

The dowser model can be used to evaluate quality along different dimensions. It was developed to evaluate artistic quality in the performing arts, that is, theatre, dance and music, according to the Danish municipality of Aarhus's need to evaluate its cultural institutions. The model is quite simple. Three arrows with angles of 120 degrees to each other reflect 'Intention' (I), 'Ability' (A) and 'Necessity' (N), and the length of the arrows indicates the emphasis on each of the three elements.

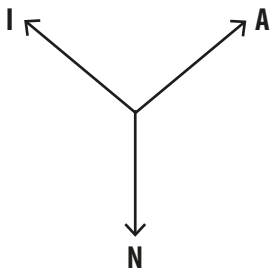

Figure 3. The dowser model

Source: Langsted, Hannah and Larsen 2003.

'Intention' and 'ability' can be broadly translated as the artistic will to express and communicate, and technical ability, respectively, while 'necessity' reflects the societal necessity of the work of art – its relevance in a cultural policy context. The model also notes the necessity of considering the time perspective, that something can develop positively or negatively over time, that it may have potential. It also states that artistic quality is related to context, particularly the resources at one's disposal, and the cultural policy goals. The idea behind the model is to create an arena for discussing quality where a dialogue process can be operationalised. Thus, this relatively general model can be applied in evaluations of projects, individual performances and institutions. It builds on peer review of artistic quality. It is not normative in suggesting that the perfect work of art should have arrows of equal length, so that everything is well-balanced. On the contrary, the model can be used to raise awareness of the fact that some people in some statements about artistic

309 Langsted, Hannah and Larsen 2003, p. 115.

quality emphasise 'ability', while others in another context may attach more importance to 'intention' or 'necessity', and that yet others in a third context may emphasise the coherence between some or all the arrows.[310]

Another possibility is to emphasise the *opinions, experiences and assessments of the viewers or users*. In what Søren Kjørup calls 'the instrumental understanding', quality is inherent in the work of art, but the focus is on the aesthetic experience it triggers in viewers (who can be experts or the general public). In a more radical version, namely the psychological understanding of quality, artistic quality is not a characteristic of the work of art, but an expression of its impact on people who experience it. Both these understandings share the view that the quality of a work of art can, at least partially, be evaluated on the basis of the experiences, reactions and states it triggers in viewers. Tygstrup et al. speak of indeterminate effect:

> There are many ways of being affected by an encounter with a work of art, ranging from disappointment to joy, from unease to insight, from enjoyment to disgust, and many, many more. In other words, the work has a certain effect. We seek it out for this effect. But we can also find it difficult to put into words how it has affected us. What we take from our encounter with a work of art is often ambiguous – a particular mood, a fleeting pleasure. We are left with an incomplete answer to the question that the work of art asked us.[311]

Although it may be difficult to register – not to mention to study – what an encounter with art means to individuals, some attempts have been made to measure the recipient's experience of a work of art – whether in the form of a performance, a concert, a piece of visual art or other art experiences.[312]

It is important to distinguish between *the audience's evaluation of quality* and the *impact on the audience*.

The users' or viewers' *evaluations of quality* can, for example, be measured by asking the audience how they perceived the quality of a cultural experience. This is the approach chosen by the Royal Danish Theatre's quality project, which has been running since 1997. The project has involved surveys of audiences, asking them directly to assess the quality of performances on a scale from 1 to 5.[313] We will return to this project later.

When evaluating *impacts* at the individual level, the purpose is to shed light on how participation in different cultural events, etc., has influenced

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310 Langsted, Hannah and Larsen 2003, p. 154.
311 Tygstrup et al. 2017 (author's translation).
312 These studies build on an old tradition in sociology (e.g. Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1966).
313 The Royal Danish Theatre 1997.

recipients.[314] This influence has typically been studied using questionnaires or qualitative interviews with audiences.

Post-event questionnaires are one way of measuring the short-term impacts of an event. When using questionnaires, all response options must be defined in advance, which means that indicators must reflect all aspects of possible responses. Different constructs and indicators can be used, but the following are among the most commonly used groups of indicators:

- engagement, energy, tension, concentration, captivation and absorption
- personal resonance, emotional connection, empathy and inspiration
- learning and thinking, provocation and intellectual stimulation
- aesthetic growth, discovery, aesthetic validation and creative stimulation
- social connectedness, sense of belonging, shared experience, social bridging and social bonding[315]

Carnwath and Brown describe three limitations of post-event surveys.[316] Firstly, surveys can naturally capture only aspects of the experience that the respondent is conscious of. Secondly, it is difficult to compare results from post-event questionnaires across events. Thirdly, a post-event questionnaire covers only the audience's immediate responses after the event, and not the long-term impacts.

Qualitative post-event interviews allow for greater openness to respondents' reflections, since there are no set constructs or indicators. Such interviews are therefore better able to elicit negative or mixed responses not revealed by questionnaires. Qualitative post-event research is even more closely linked to individual events than questionnaire surveys are, making it impossible to compare results from different events.

A different method is retrospective identification of events. This method entails analysing the longitudinal impacts of events, impacts that neither post-event questionnaires nor qualitative interviews capture. Retrospective identification of impactful events can provide insight into and understanding of the role that different cultural experiences play in people's lives. It is difficult to define themes or general indicators for assessing longitudinal impacts of participation in cultural events, but there are some recurring themes across several studies:

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314 The rest of this section uses findings from Bille and Fjællegaard 2015.
315 See Throsby 2001; Bakhshi and Throsby 2010; New Economics Foundation 2008; Brown and Novak 2007 and 2013.
316 Carnwath and Brown 2014.

- self-awareness and an expanded worldview
- well-being, respite, catharsis, restoration and escapism
- benefits arising from self-expression[317]

Carnwath and Brown summarise the above-mentioned methods and provide an overview of how arts and culture can impact people over time.[318]

Figure 4. Types of individual impacts of cultural experiences

Concurrent impacts (impacts that occur during an experience)	Experienced impacts (observed post-event, hours or days later)	Expanded and cumulative impacts (lifelong memories, weeks or years later)
Unconscious reactions and states Physiological response (heart rate, etc.) Pre-cognitive response (arousal) Captivation (absorption, concentration) Energy and tension	Short-term experienced impacts: Emotional affect and meaning Spiritual uplift Learning and critical reflection Social connectedness Aesthetic enrichment and creative activation These impacts can occur before, during and after an experience, but are typically measured afterwards.	Delayed impacts of individual events and impacts that accrue through repeated engagement in cultural activities over time: Memory of the event Sense of social belonging Increased cultural capacity Increased capacity for empathy Expanded worldview Health benefits Subjective well-being

Source: Carnwath and Brown 2014.

Essentially, all attempts to operationalise the objective perception of quality have failed. It is possible, however, to 'measure' or at least register both experts' and users' assessments and perceptions of quality, and the impacts on users, in particular, have been the focus of several studies. New methods are constantly being developed in this field.

Recent studies from Australia and England on the measurement and quantification of quality

In this section, we describe and discuss two large-scale recent studies that operationalise and quantify quality and impact. Given the understandings of quality described in the previous section, we examine, among other things, which understandings of quality the projects are relying on.

317 See Radbourne, Glow and Johanson 2010; Foreman-Wernet and Dervin 2013; White and Hede 2008; Walmsley 2013; and Everett and Barrett 2011.

318 A new and interesting approach is brain research, which may in the future provide greater insight into what effects the reception of different forms of art has on the human brain, and thereby what significance art has for human experience and development.

Before we turn to these two studies, it is worth mentioning one major project that stands out in Denmark, namely the Royal Danish Theatre's project *Registrering og optimering af forestillingernes kvalitet* [Registration and optimisation of performance quality], which has been running for 20 years. The project's starting point was the Royal Danish Theatre's performance-based contract with the Ministry of Culture for the period 1996–1999. One of the requirements in the contract was that the theatre had to improve its artistic quality, and this requirement in turn included a requirement for the theatre to conduct a development project aimed at registering and optimising the quality of performances. The theatre initiated a pre-project involving several external researchers, which concluded with a report in 1997.[319] The report made a number of proposals, including extensive measurement and registration of perceptions of performance quality among different stakeholders, including the audience (audience surveys), critics, external experts and the theatre itself (self-evaluation). The Royal Danish Theatre has continued to measure audiences' perceptions of quality through questionnaire surveys, as well as registering critics' assessments and conducting self-evaluations.[320] This approach has made it possible to measure the various stakeholders' assessments, but, like the two major projects in Australia and England that we discuss later in the article, the project suffers from a number of problems. Moreover, as far as we know, little use has been made of the results except as legitimisation in relation to the theatre's board and the Ministry of Culture.[321]

Although this project is smaller in scope and covers only a single institution, it resembles in many ways the two major studies conducted in recent years in the state of Western Australia and in England, which we now describe.

The Government of Western Australia's Department of Culture and the Arts initiated the project 'Measuring the Quality of the Arts' in 2010.[322] Its purpose was 'to produce data and insights that not only tell a better story, for both Government and the public, of the full value of arts and cultural activities to the public, but which are also regarded as relevant, credible and useful to artists and cultural practitioners across the state to plan and develop their practice'. A three-level framework for measuring the value of culture was developed using the English cultural scientist John Holden's research:

319 The Royal Danish Theatre 1997.
320 Bille Hansen 1997a and Jensen 2000.
321 During the latest years, The Royal Danish Theatre has worked on a new project, which concentrates on understanding audience behavior and different segments of their audience.
322 Government of Western Australia 2014.

- the intrinsic value of arts and culture
- the instrumental value of arts and culture, a level that focuses on arts and culture's direct and indirect contributions to employment, the development of tourism, education, economic development, social stability and improved health
- the institutional values, which focus on how arts and culture contribute to a democratic and well-functioning society, among other things[323]

The initial phase of the project up until 2014 focused on developing ways of measuring the intrinsic value of arts and culture, since that was seen as the greatest challenge. In parallel with this project, a pilot project called 'Quality Metrics' started in Manchester.[324] The development process in Western Australia and the cooperation with the Manchester project led to eight core quality dimensions being developed. These eight core quality dimensions and who evaluates them are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Eight core quality dimensions

CORE DIMENSION	SURVEY QUESTIONS	SELF	PEER	PUBLIC
Relevance	It had something to say about today's world.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Captivation	It was absorbing and held my attention.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Originality	It was ground breaking.	Yes	Yes	No
Distinctiveness	It was different from things I've experienced before.	No	No	Yes
Excellence – global	It was amongst the best of its type in the world.	Yes	Yes	No
Excellence – local	It was amongst the best of its type in Australia.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Risk	The artists/curators really challenged themselves with this.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rigour	It seemed well thought through and put together.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Government of Western Australia, Department of Culture and the Arts 2014, p. 12.

The Government of Western Australia continued to work on the project with the goal to develop quantitative measurement tools for use in self-evaluations by artists and cultural institutions, in feedback to the political system on the quality of arts and culture events, and for benchmarking across sectors and national borders. Artists and the culture sector were directly involved in this process in order to ensure relevance to the sector and to establish the legitimacy of the metrics. To operationalise the measurements, which, given the nature of the project, is a difficult challenge, the project formulated

323 Holden 2004, 2006, 2009.
324 Bunting and Knell 2014.

two overarching themes – quality and outreach – for which the project, in cooperation with artists and the culture sector, prepared the set of indicators shown in Figure 6.[325]

Figure 6. Indicators of the intrinsic value of art

QUALITY DIMENSION	DEFINITION
QUALITY	
Inquisitiveness	The extent to which the work promotes curiosity in artist and audience
Imagination	The extent to which the work explores new possibilities and views
Originality	The extent to which the work breaks new ground (modes of practice and content)
Risk	The extent to which the artist is fearless and negotiates new artistic approaches
Rigour	The extent to which the work has undergone thorough research and development
Currency	The timeliness of the creative idea in relation to contemporary events
Authenticity	The extent to which the work respects cultural traditions or is unique
Innovation	The extent to which the work is able to realise creative ideas to real world outcomes
Excellence	The extent to which the work is widely regarded as best of its type in the world
OUTREACH	
Diversity	The extent to which the work engages a broad cross-section of society
Connection	The quality of the connection of the work with communities of interest
Number	Number of people in communities of interest who directly engage with the work
Leverage	The ability of the work to attract investment from a range of non-DCA sources
Platform	The capacity of the work to have long-term influence and importance to communities of interest and practice
Collaboration	The extent to which the work connects with communities of practice

Source: Government of Western Australia, Department of Culture and the Arts 2014, p. 10.

All responses are collected in a database containing data for each quality dimension assessed by the artist before and after the performance, peers before and after the performance, and the audience after the performance.[326]

The project in England was first implemented as a pilot project involving 13 cultural institutions in Manchester, followed by testing at 150 institutions throughout England with the support of Arts Council England. *Quality*

325 The assessment uses a continuous scale from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. 'Strongly agree' translates into a score of 1, 'Neutral' into 0.5, and 'Strongly disagree' into 0.0.

326 Culture Counts has also been used elsewhere in the world, for example in evaluating the Cultural Programme of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland (Bunting and Knell 2015).

Metrics Final Report, Quality Metrics National Test – Culture Counts[327] was published in 2016.

Each of the 150 cultural institutions undertook to evaluate three exhibitions, performances or events. A total of 374 evaluations were conducted in the period from 1 November 2015 until 31 May 2016. They meticulously measured the 12 quality dimensions described in Figure 7.[328]

Figure 7. Twelve quality dimensions

QUALITY DIMENSION	SURVEY QUESTIONS
Presentation	It was well produced and presented.
Distinctiveness	It was different from things I've experienced before.
Captivation	It was absorbing and held my attention.
Challenge	It was thought-provoking.
Enthusiasm	I would come to something like this again.
Local impact	It is important that it's happening here.
Relevance	It had something to say about the world in which we live.
Rigour	It was well thought-through and put together.
Risk	The artists/curators were not afraid to try new things.
Originality	It was groundbreaking.
Excellence	It is one of the best examples of its type that I have seen.
Concept	It was an interesting idea.

Source: Knell and Whitaker 2016.

The different art forms were registered, making it possible to conduct analyses across art forms, or analyses that compare, for example, ballet performances at different institutions. The work uses broad categories, such as theatre, music, dance, literature or film, as well as more specific categories, such as sculpture, photography, visual art, opera, musicals, ballet, contemporary dance, literature, poetry and the spoken word, etc. This breadth makes it possible to conduct a number of meta-analyses afterwards, for example to find out whether perceptions of the quality of cultural events differ between events taking place in cities and in more rural areas, whether perceptions of quality differ between the young, middle-aged and elderly, and whether perceptions of quality differ between different types of arts and cultural institutions.

The two projects in Australia and England have cooperated closely, use the same technological tools, and are clearly inspired by each other. However,

327 Knell and Whitaker 2016.

328 This assessment also used a continuous scale from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. 'Strongly agree' translates into a score of 1, 'Neutral' into 0.5, and 'Strongly disagree' into 0.0.

the process of developing the quality indicators has been conducted separately in the two countries in dialogue with players in the culture sector. The high degree of agreement between the two sets of indicators is most probably due to the two countries' shared cultural roots. The parameters arrived at would undoubtedly be different if a corresponding process were to be carried out in, for example, an African culture or in a country with an Islamic cultural background.

Discussion of the studies from Australia and England

The projects conducted in Australia and England have chosen to elicit the audiences', artists' and peers' quality assessments (since it is well known that their evaluations of quality rarely agree), and to a certain extent to also compare evaluations with expectations (ex ante and ex post measurements). However, there are some problems associated with these measurements. Some problems have to do with the indicators as a tool, some with audiences' evaluations. The choice of evaluation model is also debatable.

As regards the *indicators*, it is worth mentioning that although a rough consensus can be reached on several selected indicators (e.g., see Figure 5), it is, as mentioned in section 2, a potential problem that these indicators are static, while the concept of art is dynamic and changes over time. For example, this static nature could mean that some forms of expression fall outside the scope of the indicators, or that art changes without the criteria or indicators keeping up. Conceivably, even the criterion 'originality' could become less important over time. Such measurements are therefore somewhat open to criticism for being excluding and conformist, and for doing more to consolidate existing understandings of quality than to encourage the originality that the measurements themselves define as a value.

One argument against this line of criticism is that several indicators are very broad and general, for example, 'distinctiveness' (It was different from things I've experienced before), 'relevance' (It had something to say about today's world) and 'excellence' (It was amongst the best of its type in the world). It can therefore be argued that they are capable of accommodating changes in how art is understood, so that the indicators can still be used even if the standards and art were to change over time, so that what is considered 'distinctive' today may not be seen as such in ten years. However, such dynamic changes mean that it is impossible to compare evaluations over time.

A further challenge associated with indicators such as 'distinctiveness' and 'originality' is that they do not necessarily capture the quality aspect. A work of art can be extremely distinctive and original and still be rubbish – uninteresting, incoherent, simply of low quality.

The data collected in England showed that significantly lower scores are generally awarded for the three dimensions 'challenge', 'distinctiveness' and 'relevance' than for the others. For example, some performances are recurring events, such as Christmas concerts, and are not meant to be distinctive, suggesting that it may not always be expedient to use the same indicators for different types of performances. Project administrators in England are therefore still looking into the possibility of using more refined and differentiated indicators by refining the survey questions and adapting them to the art form in question. This solution is in line with one proposed by Danielsen, who, in another context, has argued that a nuanced system of concepts and set of criteria are necessary to evaluate different music genres.[329] In her opinion, different criteria should be used for different genres of music, not just for music as an art form.

However, the more nuanced the indicators for different art forms are, the more difficult it will be to compare quality across different types of artistic and cultural events on the basis of these indicators. But if numerical values cannot be used for comparison across art forms or over time, their usefulness can be questioned. In other words, reflection on the data is essential. That is precisely what Jørn Langsted's dowser model advocates.[330] The point is to create an arena for discussing quality in which a dialogue process can be operationalised. But quantification poses a challenge: once something (in this case, quality) has been quantified, the figures tend to become 'truths', and reflections are forgotten.

Regarding *the audience's assessments*, it can be relevant to distinguish between the audience's perception of quality and impacts on the audience, as mentioned above. Indicators used in the two projects appear to be a mix of the two. A statement such as 'It was amongst the best of its type in Australia' is directly quality-related, while the statement 'It was thought-provoking' has more to do with the impact on the audience.

However, is it relevant to ask the audience to evaluate quality? And can an artwork's impact on the audience be analysed via relatively simple questions? A serious criticism is that only those aspects respondents are conscious of are measured. As Tygstrup argues about 'indeterminate effect', asking audiences about their perceptions and experiences of a work of art can be quite difficult because they are not necessarily aware of how and why it has an impact on them.[331]

329 Danielsen 2015.
330 Langsted, Hannah and Larsen 2003.
331 Tygstrup et al. 2017.

Whether one measures quality or impacts, the audience's scoring will always be subjective. That is not a problem in itself. However, individual assessments must be expected to be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by a number of factors related either to the consumers themselves (such as previous experience, education, gender and age) or to external factors (for example current trends). The audience's former experience must be assumed to have a bearing on their quality assessment. Many art forms, for example opera and classical music, assume the audience has some degree of experience, so that the audience will find an event more rewarding the more extensive their experience and knowledge are.[332] In other words, a well-educated and culturally active audience must be assumed to have a different understanding of quality than a less well-educated and less culturally active audience has, simply because of differences in their backgrounds and levels of knowledge. Likewise, age must be expected to affect measurements, since with age often comes experience.

Quite surprising therefore is that the English project did not find many significant differences in audiences' assessments when it comes to, for example, gender, age or geography. The same conclusion is found in the Royal Danish Theatre's audience analyses going back many years. In this case, it was also impossible to find many systematic differences in quality assessments attributable to audiences' socioeconomic status, for example, education, income, occupation, gender and age.[333] Generally speaking, there seem to be few significant differences. Why is this so, and what can it tell us?

The results from England showed that, on average, the audience awarded the quality a score of 0.8 on a scale from 0 to 1. Correspondingly, the Royal Danish Theatre's audience evaluations going back many years showed that quality assessments are very stable. On a scale from 1 to 5, the audience has awarded an average score of 3.5, while assessments of ballet performances have been slightly higher than those for operas and plays.[334] The interesting thing here is therefore not the average score, but the variation. The results also show that audiences' assessments do not fluctuate much, either for individual performances or across performances. Most people deem performances to be slightly above average, indicating that audiences are evaluating their *general satisfaction* with the cultural experience rather than its quality in relation to specific parameters. Thus, if the purpose is to measure quality, the indicators measure something else than what was intended. Their validity can

332 See, for example, Stigler and Becker 1977.
333 Bille 2004–2015.
334 Bille 2004–2015.

therefore be questioned, since there is strong evidence that the studies do not measure what they were intended to measure.

In general, professional reviews of performances exhibit greater variation and fluctuation,[335] suggesting that the indicators are more suitable for peer review than for quality assessment by the general public. Data also show that peer reviews generally give a poorer score than the artist's own assessment does. On the other hand, there is a high degree of correlation between the artist's or curator's assessments and those of the audience.[336]

Finally, the *purpose of the measurements* can be questioned, and needs to be related to the choice of evaluation model. Generally speaking, evaluations can be conducted for different purposes. Examples include control, learning, information, strategic and legitimisation purposes, or the purposes may be of a more ritualistic and symbolic nature where the very act of conducting an evaluation is the important thing, although no one is really interested in its results or what it can be used for.

The Royal Danish Theatre's quality assessment project was largely about control and legitimisation in relation to the performance-based contract with the Ministry of Culture, which, as mentioned in section 3, required the theatre to improve its artistic quality. The Australian and English projects also had clear legitimisation purposes. The Government of Western Australia's project explicitly mentions that its purpose was to produce data and insights that tell a better story, for both the Government and the public, about the full value of arts and cultural activities to the public.[337]

The learning aspect is also emphasised both in England and in Australia. The project 'Measuring the Quality of the Arts' explicitly argues that it is important that the collected data and accumulated knowledge be relevant and useful for artists and cultural practitioners across the state in planning and developing their practice.[338] It can be difficult, however, to envisage how and what learning will result from more or new surveys that continue to build on the same paradigm. For example, in theatre productions, exhibitions or other art projects, it is significant that once a project or a production is finished and becomes available to the public, there is rarely room for changes. The decisions, interpretations and work of the artistic director and participating artists determine the end product's quality. In other words, it is problematic regarding the applicability of such quality measurements that the production's quality is created before the première, while quality assessments

335 Bille and Baldin 2017.
336 Knell and Whitaker 2016.
337 Government of Western Australia 2014.
338 Government of Western Australia 2014.

occur afterwards. In the manufacture of washing machines, for example, continuous quality assessment can be used to improve product quality. This is not the case with theatrical productions or other arts and culture projects that do not repeat and improve the same product over time, but constantly stage new productions or new exhibitions, or create new projects.[339] Experience gained from measuring the quality of a production of 'The Magic Flute' cannot easily be applied to a production of 'La Boheme'.

If great importance is attached to the learning aspect, process evaluations, which focus precisely on the process rather than on the product, will often be most relevant. Langsted's dowser model emphasises learning, since the dialogue about assessments is paramount.[340] However, such evaluations will not have the same legitimising effect, since they do not evaluate the end product's quality numerically.

The two studies have chosen to use stakeholder evaluations, such as user evaluations and peer reviews, since their primary purpose has been legitimisation, using different stakeholders' assessments of quality, rather than measuring, for example, the process, impacts and goal attainment. If the intention were to use measurements as the basis for cultural policy decisions, it would be more relevant to use impact models, goal attainment models or economic models. The economic models also set the value created in relation to the costs. Therefore, if the project's purpose is to analyse, for example, whether public funding for arts and cultural institutions is allocated most efficiently, these economic value–based evaluations would be more useful.

Impact at societal level

From a cultural policy perspective, arguments for public funding for culture and cultural policy goals will often be related to impacts on someone or something. For example, art projects or cultural institutions receive funding because they are expected to have impacts on individuals (users and non-users), and, finally, at societal level.

As Tygstrup et al. write, a fundamental assumption of cultural policy in a welfare state is that supporting artistic activity will create a society with broader horizons, better self-knowledge, more creativity and stronger social cohesion: firstly because cultural policy improves the quality of people's surroundings and experience, and secondly because it contributes to greater enlightenment, broader horizons and sensibility, and thus strengthens fundamental democratic

339 See Caves 2000 on the importance of 'nobody knows', which is about how nobody knows the quality in advance – neither the producers nor the consumers.
340 Langsted, Hannah and Larsen 2003.

values. In addition, there are many ways in which artistic and cultural activities contribute to innovation and value creation for society.[341]

The impact of a (political) effort can be defined as the difference between the outcome if the effort is made and the outcome if it is not. One example is public funding for a new art project. What impact will this funding have? We also must ask: Impacts on whom and what? The impact chain illustrates the levels (Figure 8).

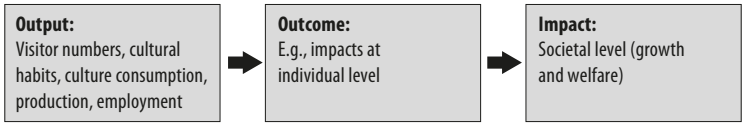

Figure 8. The impact chain

Source: The Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis 2012, Weiss 1972.

The first level is output. Here we can, for example, measure how support for a theatre changes the output, for example the number of plays produced, or the number of tickets sold. These are quantitative measurements that typically do not concern quality in any way.

The next level is outcome, which can be impacts at the individual level. What is the outcome for people who experience a work of art? Quantity (higher audience figures) is usually not the only goal – another goal is quality (what the audience gets out of the experience). At this level, quality can be assessed in relation to the recipient's experience of the work of art (as described in section 2). The point of departure is that arts and culture can intrinsically influence an individual. The intrinsic influence is the immediate feeling that arts and culture create in an individual, meaning that arts and culture can also influence individuals' spiritual development and shape their intellectual and human skills, such as creativity, quality of life, identity formation, aesthetic sense, social criticism, etc.

The final level is impact, that is, the effects at societal level, including long-term impacts on growth or welfare. These impacts can take the form of impacts on education in the broadest sense, democracy, freedom of expression, diversity, innovation, social cohesion, etc. A connection must be assumed to exist between impact at the individual and societal levels. Clearly, the further along the impact chain we go, the more difficult (not to say impossible) it becomes to measure the effects of arts and culture, since the

341 Tygstrup et al. 2017.

causal relationship between arts and culture and impacts at the societal level is difficult to prove.

Several researchers have voiced the criticism that cultural policy can thereby be perceived as *instrumental* in relation to some societal goals instead of focusing on the 'intrinsic value' of arts and culture.[342] Joli Jensen, for example, has criticised all rationales in cultural policy for being instrumental because they focus on what arts and culture *does* rather than on what it *is*.[343] This distinction between instrumental value and 'intrinsic' or 'inherent' value is not necessarily very useful, however, since what the audience 'gets out of' an arts and culture experience (impacts at the individual level) must be assumed to be crucial to impacts one can expect to see societally, which, ultimately, must be regarded as the final goal.

Therefore, it would be interesting for future research to investigate the connection between quality and impact. Does higher quality also lead to greater impact at the individual level? Perhaps, but not necessarily. In his article in this anthology, Professor Simo Säätelä argues that we must trust experts' assessments when steering the public towards high-quality experiences.[344] It could be interesting, for example, to examine the extent of the connection between experts' quality assessments and impacts at the individual level (the audience).

Generally speaking, the fundamental questions concern to what extent and under what circumstances the connections illustrated in Figure 9 arise.

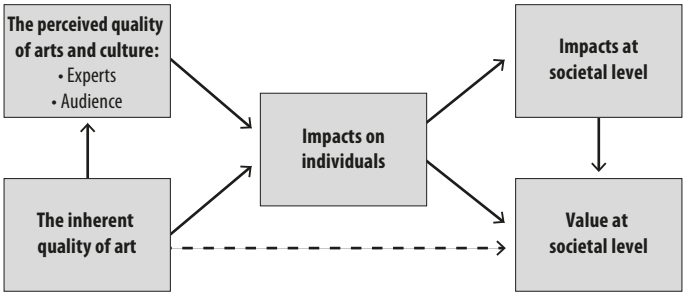

Figure 9. The connection between quality, impact and values[345]

The way forward, regarding both quality and impacts, seems to be to scrutinise the impacts at the individual level, because some kind of connections

342 Duelund 2003; Belfiore 2002 and Vestheim 1994.
343 Jensen 2003.
344 See Säätelä's article in this anthology.
345 A discussion of value and the concept of value is beyond the scope of this article.

must be assumed to exist between quality and impacts at the individual level, as well as between impacts at the individual level and the desired impact societally. It is highly relevant and interesting, from both a research and a political perspective, to learn more about these mechanisms, even though it will never be possible to prove a direct causal relationship.[346]

This conclusion is in line with that of another major research project conducted in England, 'The Cultural Value Project: Understanding the value of arts & culture', funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council.[347] Researchers aimed to solve two fundamental challenges: to identify the components that, together, constitute the culture's value, and to consider and develop methods for evaluating these components. They concluded that the experiences of individuals must be the primary point of departure when assessing the importance of arts and culture. They identified three important areas: to form reflective individuals who understand themselves and others, to form engaged citizens, and to strengthen imagination and creativity, and thereby also innovation. In the English project, researchers proposed that much more work should be done to develop methods for understanding the value of arts and culture. Among other things, they proposed: a) better use of evaluations, not just for legitimisation purposes, but also for better understanding the impact art has on audiences, b) applying a broader range of methods, not least qualitative methods from the humanities, c) further developing welfare economics methods, such as the Contingent Valuation method, and d) developing methods for understanding the importance of digitalisation, including how it affects people's cultural experiences and its effect on the consumption and production of arts and culture in general.[348]

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346 Generally speaking, studies that try to prove causal relationships, for example between arts and culture and health or other socially beneficial effects, encounter major problems. As Professor Christian Hjorth-Andersen writes: 'The big problem is to control for the characteristics of the persons involved. Some people have a personal energy surplus – let us call them plus-variants. Plus-variants will also typically be in good health and have the energy to participate in activities. Failure to control for such effects can give the strangest results, as for example in Konlaan et al. (2000)' (Hjorth-Andersen 2013, p. 362).

347 Crossick and Kaszynska 2016.

348 The Contingent Value method relates to the economic theory of market failure, which shows that, for various reasons, the market does not always support the arts and culture that society demands. So far, only a few such studies have been conducted in the culture field in Scandinavia. One example is Bille Hansen, 1997b, which investigated the Danish population's willingness to pay for the Royal Danish Theatre via their taxes. The results showed that most non-users of the Royal Danish Theatre (and there are many) are willing to pay for the theatre even though they never attend performances. This willingness is precisely because the theatre has a value to society in addition to its immediate utility value. This non-market value far exceeds its market value, and is the most important argument in favour of public funding for culture.

Discussion and cultural policy implications

In this article, we have discussed a number of problems associated with quality measurements, some concerning the indicators and some concerning audience assessments. However, even if it were possible to overcome these more technical and methodological problems, many questions remain about the usefulness of these types of quality assessments. Although the learning aspect is emphasised in both studies, the learning potential must be assumed to be limited, and the main purpose of the studies seems primarily to be legitimisation. If the learning aspect were the main priority, process evaluation would be a more natural choice. Alternatively, more emphasis should be placed on the actual quality discussion and the dialogue, as in the dowser model, for example, rather than on numerical values.[349] Numerical values are useful as political arguments, since they tend to become 'truths'. On the other hand, they do not in the same way promote a learning process, discussions and dialogue about underlying circumstances.

What consequences can these measurements have for how we think about quality and for how arts and culture is administered and funded? In other words: What are the cultural policy implications?

Firstly, the autonomy of art can be threatened if some (problematic) quality criteria become dominant, since this development shifts power from art itself (via peer-review assessment criteria) to more political and bureaucratic control.

Secondly, it is well known that if quantification predominates, what is measured will often become the policy goal. We have seen the same challenge regarding the many economic impact analyses that have been conducted since the 1980s. Countless such studies have been conducted to calculate the more direct economic effects of arts and culture.[350] Economic impact studies measure the effect on employment and consumption of, for example, building a new culture centre, and their point of departure is that a cultural institution or cultural events attract visitors who will not only spend money on the ticket or entrance fee, but will also eat in local restaurants, visit local shops and perhaps stay at local hotels.[351] The argument becomes that 'it may be profitable'. These analyses therefore tend to make economic growth the goal justifying the investment, while culture becomes a means to an end. The means and the end switch places, which may have unfortunate consequences, for example, regarding what forms of arts and culture receive public funding.

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349 Langsted, Hannah and Larsen 2003.

350 See, for example, Bille Hansen 1993 and 1995 and Bille 2012.

351 For a critique and discussion of this approach, see Bille Hansen 1993 and 1995; Bille 2012, and Bille and Lorenzen 2008.

Naturally, arts and culture should be the end, while economic aspects should be the means. The difference between economic impact studies and quality measurements is that while quality is an important goal in cultural policy, economic growth can be seen as a side effect. The main problem remains the same, however: when it is so difficult to measure the significance of arts and culture to people, we measure what we can, for example, simplified measures of quality, economic impact or something else.

Thirdly, if audiences' assessments are used as the basis for deciding resource allocation, there is a risk that cultural institutions will offer only what they expect to result in positive audience assessments.[352] If cultural institutions adapt their activities with a view to gaining high scores from audiences, it will clearly not necessarily result in either higher quality, the attainment of cultural policy goals, or optimal resource allocation.

We see the same discussion regarding student evaluations of university teaching. We see a clear tendency for lecturers to adjust their teaching to the criteria they know students emphasise in order to achieve good evaluation results. However, several studies have shown a negative correlation between high student evaluation scores and teaching quality. Barga et al. write: 'We find that our measure of teacher effectiveness is negatively correlated with the students' evaluations.'[353]

Ultimately, we have concluded that such quality indicators are not a particularly effective way of measuring the quality of arts and culture. Given the contemporary cultural policy challenges facing the cultural sector, attempts to quantify quality seem less needed than attempts to measure impact(s). To pursue a well-informed cultural policy, measuring effects at the individual level will be most interesting. Just as there must be assumed to be a link between quality and impacts at the individual level, a link must be assumed to exist between impacts at the individual level and the desired impacts at the societal level, for example in the form of cultivating fundamental democratic values, broadening people's horizons, bringing enlightenment, innovating and creating value in a broad sense. However, this type of research will require different research questions and different methods than those used in the projects from Australia and England.

352 Government of Western Australia 2014.

353 Barga et al. 2011, Feistauer and Richter 2016 and Stark and Freishtat 2014 reached the same conclusion.

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How is value negotiated in the arts and culture?
What is quality? And what does it entail to talk about quality in an artistic and cultural context?

The ten articles in *Contested Qualities* discuss such questions from a variety of perspectives. They reflect on the conceptual and historical background for the discussion about quality, they analyse quality from the perspective of critical theory, and they raise the question: On which grounds – if common grounds can be found – is aesthetic and cultural value evaluated today?

The book does not offer any clear-cut definition of quality or waterproof methodology for the assessment of artistic or cultural value. In fact, many of the articles highlight and analyse situations where contrasting notions of quality collide, or seem to. Thus, the common ground for aesthetic and cultural evaluations seems to be the ongoing negotiations between conflicting notions of quality. It is precisely in the critical discourse about different artistic and cultural expressions, and in the negotiations between different perspectives on art and culture, that quality is established.

Contested Qualities results from a research programme initiated by Arts Council Norway. The book's articles are selected and translated from two anthologies published in Norwegian: *Kvalitetsforståelser* (Notions of Quality, 2016) and *Kvalitetsforhandlinger* (Negotiating Quality, 2018).

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