

## **Unfolding from the concrete**

### **An introduction to rhetorical didactics of literature and the fine arts <sup>1</sup>**

Two sisters growing up in rural Norway attend a six-month ballet course sometime in the early 1960s. The venue is an assembly room on the first floor of a bank building, a room normally used for parish work and meetings of the local women's rural institute. Ballet is foreign to a community where dancing means traditional folk dancing. The teacher has moved to the community from elsewhere, she comes from a theatrical milieu and wears colourful clothes and big hats. The tape recorder plays metallic-sounding music: Tchaikovsky, excerpts from Swan Lake. Once a week. Positions. Repetition. First, second, third position. Arms. And legs. Arms and legs at the same time. Pirouettes. Turn around, then. And then — entering the floor in uneven lines: a flock of swans occupies the room. The boy in the group is the prince. She, the only one in a ballet dress, is the princess. The flock of swans have starched petticoats and new pink ballet shoes bought by mail order from England. The curtain is raised on the production at the charity bazaar before the summer holidays.

What does this memory of a ballet class in a small Norwegian village have to do with art didactics? How can what happened be understood didactically? And what does it mean to employ a rhetorical perspective to reflect on this and correspondingly examples of art didactics? This book helps to answer these questions. True, none of the articles discusses dancing, but the texts deal with various other examples of art didactics in practice. The examples are taken from music and literature, art, crafts and drama. What the authors have in common is that they develop didactic methods *on the basis of concrete material*. The reflections on art didactics are developed *on the various art forms' own terms*. And these case studies all adopt *a rhetorical perspective*. The book as a whole thus establishes a way of thinking about art didactics — rhetorical didactics. In this introduction, I will explain how I understand the premises of the book, and the connection between them: the rhetorical, the

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<sup>1</sup> Norwegian version: “Ut frå det konkrete. Innleiing til ein retorisk kunstfagdidaktikk”, i Nyrnes, Aslaug & Niels Lehmann (red.), 2008: *Ut frå det konkrete. Bidrag til ein retorisk kunstfagdidaktikk*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

concrete, and the arts disciplines' own terms. But first, I will take a detour via established didactic thinking in order to illustrate the traditions in relation to which the book is written.

### **The categories of art didactics**

It is neither difficult nor controversial to recognise the example above as a didactic practice. We have the teacher who knows – and children who do not. We have a period of training and work towards a goal, a performance. The subject is not an established school subject, but teaching takes place in the available premises, using the equipment that is at hand.

When discussing the example as art didactic practice, it is easy to slip into established ways of reading and evaluating the situation. It is common to start by defining didactics – for example as a teaching situation where a teacher imparts knowledge about a subject or topic to students. Teaching situations are usually regulated by national curricula, and it is therefore relevant to ask questions about the position (or lack of such) of ballet in the current curriculum. Then, one could define art, and ask whether this is a form of dissemination of art. The teacher's commands and style will be a central issue, as will the question of what it is that inspires and motivates the students to participate in this voluntary extra curricular activity. The history of the subject, school and cultural policies, national curricula, developmental psychology – together, these factors provide us with guidelines for deciding and discussing the example as relevant or satisfactory from an art didactics perspective.

Didactic reflections usually start from definitions of concepts based on social science, pedagogical and psychological theories, before proceeding to assess how various practices in clearly defined subjects suit various ideal ways of doing things. Delimiting the field of 'art didactics' will traditionally start with definitions of 'didactics' and 'art'.

*Art* is a collective term for music, dance, theatre, visual art and literature. We all have a general idea of what it means, even though there will be differences of opinion as to what deserves to be labelled art. There is certainly some distance between the now decaying ballet shoes with home-made elastic ankle straps and the swan-like professional dancer Ingrid Lorentzen on stage at the Norwegian Opera House. Lorentzen is art, the ballet kids are not – even though the music is the same. We think of art as something exceptional and original – what we call the sublime. Art is the object that others, i.e. artists, make. Ballet performed by kids, on the other hand, is play or practice or training in discipline or attempts at imitation - it is certainly not art, and must not be mistaken for art. It is thus an integral part of the understanding of art, a characteristic of it, that there is a line between art and art-like activities.

This means that art is defined, among other things, through the differences that exist between it and work on art in teaching situations.

*Didactics* is the science of teaching. A definition of didactics will usually include the relationship between a teacher and pupils, a supervisor and students, one person who knows a lot and several who know less. The ‘a lot’ and ‘less’ part refer to interchangeable subjects or topics that are not part of the initial determination of the nature of the didactic situation. And if they are included, they are pre-determined as content, opinions, ideas, finished objects, a *what*: what parts of a subject must be known at various stages. The concept of didactics has traditionally been accompanied by a psychological understanding of communication. Communication consists of relations between people; people who can be inspired, motivated, sympathetic, strict, have a way with children or not, be creative, knowledgeable or inactive. This understanding of didactics rests on the formula of *subject plus communication*, or *content plus communication*, where the first thing to be done is to find out *what* to communicate, and then find or invent smart or creative ways of doing so.

Our perception of the discipline’s main categories is critical to our reflections on art didactics. The dichotomies of art vs. pedagogy and subject vs. communication often result in futile discussions that do not contribute much to finding the distinguishing characteristics of art didactics. The dichotomies seem to remove us from the specifically art didactic field and take us to an inter-theoretical abstract sphere. Such dichotomies risk obscuring important common elements in artistic processes, common elements found in every single example of artistic endeavours, every example of art practice at any level, both inside and outside art institutions and educational institutions.

Let us therefore imagine that we, for instance, call the performance in our example ballet. That highlights the similarity between Ingrid Lorentzen's and the children's pirouettes and makes it less critical to define the line between art and non-art; we can see the shared characteristics of ballet as art form and ballet for beginners. There are similarities between Ingrid Lorentzen and the young ballet girls. They all experience the culture of ballet and the culture in the ballet. They all express themselves in relation to a musical range. The girls learn this early on without having to articulate it: ballet is a physical experience of tight-fitting shoes, flowing skirts, creaky floors. Ballet is giving music physical form. Ballet is rules and grammar and cultural choices. And it is enough in itself, there and then. Dancing is not succeeding – and succeeding. Dancing is to stretch oneself through ballet’s form and grammar of positions. Because the way to learn how to dance ballet is to dance ballet. You learn to watch Lorentzen by having danced ‘like Lorentzen’. If we think like this, then ballet didactics

will no longer be independent of and distinct from the supreme qualitative norm of this art form, but it becomes a type of practice and way of working, and a type of material and equipment that aims for this norm.

This book insists that the main categories of art didactics must take practice with concrete materials as its point of departure, and develop reflections from there. We do not start with the distinction between art and pedagogy, but with a nuanced interpretation of performative work on a material. Such main categories will have to be based on and thought of on the basis of the art form's own language or range of expression. Such main categories will thus give rise to other kinds of questions about what is going on, questions asked in the precise and articulate languages of the different art forms.

This turning of art didactic thinking in the direction of concrete material and the production-aesthetical aspects can be called a *rhetorical* turn. It is in rhetoric that the articles in this book find their common rationale and explanations. Before I develop and analyse the concepts 'on the basis of the concrete' and 'the art form's own terms', I will therefore describe a rhetorical basis for thought.

### **A rhetorical turn**

An art critic will probably protest immediately if it is claimed that aesthetics and art are 'merely decorative'. Similarly, an expert in rhetoric will not accept the claim that a speech or a text is 'merely rhetoric'. Both statements contain the idea of form as something secondary, external wrapping for content or an idea, and that this wrapping can be simple, colourful or vain regardless of the *real* content. The rhetorical tradition offers a more fundamental understanding of communication than that found in such simple wrapping metaphors.

But what *is* rhetoric then? To put it simply, we can say that it is a theory about verbal language and how it functions, originally developed as guidelines on how to make a good speech. Rhetoric focuses on verbal aspects of probable knowledge, on the *how* aspect of subjects, research and all kinds of speech-making and writing. It is both the art of persuasion and a theory of formative education. It is not very precise to speak of 'the rhetorical tradition', since there are several different historical and contemporary approaches. In this context, however, we can simplify the distinction between two such approaches relating to different stages of the history of rhetoric. We can call them *classical rhetoric* and *new rhetoric*.

*Classical rhetoric* is the theory and practice of verbal language as developed in classic Greek and Latin culture. Important references include Aristotle, Quintilian and Cicero (see Andersen 1995, Barthes 1998, Fafner 1982a and 1982b, Lindhardt 1987). In his *Institutio*

*Oratoria* from the first century AD, for example, Quintilian established a text-based orientation towards the surrounding world, in which orientation in the past, present and future is based on language and text, and where knowledge of geography, politics etc. is incorporated into the great didactic project: how to become a good speaker (Quintilian 1989). The main perspective is how oral language can be used to make speeches that will function in the democratic development of society. The theory, as represented for example by Aristotle (1991), is a practical and descriptive one, containing guidelines on how to best compose and deliver an effective speech. It could be argued that this theory also provides a *strategic* perspective on how verbal language functions. The speaker has a goal or a purpose, something to communicate to the recipient, and verbal language is the means used to achieve this goal. Classical rhetoric is based on the idea that the speaker *knows what he is saying and why he is saying it*. The traditional communication model as we know it today, with the well-known variables ‘sender - message – recipient’ can be seen as a modern version of the classical rhetorical communication model, further developed in a linear direction.

Rhetoric developed from classical rhetoric via logic, geometry and aesthetics as separate disciplines into what we can roughly group together under the present-day category of *new rhetoric*. And this is where matters become more complex. New rhetoric is based on the idea that the language user *knows that he does not know what he is saying and why he is saying it*. From this perspective – represented by, among others, such philosophers as Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault – verbal language is a complicated field to enter. Verbal language often turns out to be the decisive element in a situation. ‘Language is a greater subject than ourselves, which controls us and our use of language in time and space.’ (Johannesen 1994:68) It is very difficult to speak and write in a clear and intentional manner so that the listeners and readers understand what is being communicated. Through the aesthetical range of verbal language, the fragile and cracked foundation of communication becomes evident and visible.

The relationship between classical rhetoric and new rhetoric is a paradoxical one. A didactician might feel most at home somewhere *between* these two positions. Didactic work is related to communication, but not in the traditional, linear way. It is more a question of exploring a discipline. Besides, a didactic situation contains many types of intentions, which are often at odds with each other. One endeavours to use verbal language in a conscious manner, while at the same time being challenged by the amorphous nature of the same verbal language.

It is probably not a problem to accept that rhetoric is relevant as a theoretical basis for literature didactics; after all, the discipline has verbal language as its material and workplace. Rhetoric as a relevant mode of thought for *all* art didactics is probably a less obvious conclusion. After all, art is understood and explained on the basis of aesthetic philosophy, and art is art, not verbal language. But I intend to substantiate that there is a connection between rhetoric and art didactics through two factors – a development and understanding from *within* aesthetic philosophy itself, and by problematising the role of verbal language *in* the arts.

### **From reception aesthetics to production aesthetics**

Traditionally, art has taken its understanding and theoretical perspectives from aesthetic philosophy. Aesthetic theory and philosophy associate such work with ‘eternal values’, the sublime. Aesthetic theory as we usually know it arose in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as *reception aesthetics*. By this is meant that it is primarily interested in saying something about the receiving side of art – for example, how art brings the recipient into contact with the eternal values in life, how it creates sublime experiences, and how one can train one’s eye to glimpse the sublime, and perhaps be able to describe it, too. Reception aesthetics are concerned with the artistic end product, the finished art object.

It is easy to understand and experience that a dance performance can be sublime, for both the dancer and the audience. If you have seen Ingrid Lorentzen’s *swan-like* performance, you will remember how you sat gazing in wonder. But that same dance is also *materiality*. It is the texture of fine silk, breathing, smells, the sound of a body against a floor, it is the physical sensation of eternal pirouettes fixed in time. And as realisable materiality, it is a *task* for the dancer. She must follow the music and enter at the correct time, ensure that she starts all leaps at the right speed, make flapping movements with her arms, remember that her face must also look like the face of a swan. All these tasks point to how dancing as an art form is about *doing* things in particular, precise ways. And this applies to the ballet kids as well – they are supposed to dance with their arms and legs and all of their bodies. Not quite as elegant? No, but undoubtedly *aiming for* elegance.

Aesthetic theory does not just have a reception aspect. There is also a production aspect to it – production aesthetics (see for example Melberg ed. 2007, Bø-Rygg 2007). Aristotle wrote about *episteme poietiké*, a creative, productive knowledge – let us call it the ‘poetics of knowledge’ related to *techne* - art. The concept of ‘*poietike tekhné*’ implies ‘the art of making something’ (Kennedy 1995:309). *Techne* is a ‘preparedness for production

combined with a true reasoning' (Aristotle 1988:163). It is thus a production aesthetics that links practical and theoretical insight into creative work.

The production aesthetics theory has been hidden away under a romantic notion of geniuses with inner inspiration, passion and creative personalities. But there is reason to claim that this theory of production aesthetics has survived in its clearest form precisely in rhetoric as way of thinking and practice. We can say that rhetorical thinking is *production aesthetics for verbal language*. Making an elaborate speech or making swan-like motions on a dance floor – both situations required the *production* of something from malleable materials. The same applies to curating an exhibition, reciting poems, turning notes into sound. Even reading, whether it be an image or a verbal text, can be seen as reproducing the order of the text and image. In didactics, there is a productive side to reading; it is not just understood as the reception of a finished object. The subject of the rest of this introduction will therefore be *how* rhetorical theory and rhetorical thinking can provide a language to describe and clarify this production-aesthetic aspect of the arts.

### **Verbal language and art didactics**

But what role does verbal language actually play in the arts? One important common aspect is that both the art didactician and the rhetorician are form-conscious; they work with *form*. It can be claimed that the rhetorical tradition is the tradition that throughout history has had responsibility for education *in form* by working *through* form. Changes in details are crucial both in texts and in other art forms. Details *matter*. It is the details that require work, because it is in the details that culture shows. In this book, we will encounter detailed work on form in the striking of guitar strings, montages in illustrated books, the range of sound in a poetry recital, or the start of a process drama. The arts are at home in such work on form: 'Form is the foundation for everything that creates meaning.' (Lilja 2004:39) That means that form-oriented theory is well suited to helping us understand development in artistic and art didactical work - perhaps even better than, and certainly in a more practical way than, theories about brain functions and psychological theories about the development of consciousness, intuition, creativity, intentionality, motivation and similar issues. Rhetoric *is* a form-oriented theory and practice.

In spite of the similarities between verbal language and modes of expression in other art forms, it must be emphasised that verbal language and music, images, dance and drama are different things, and that one cannot simply transfer conclusions from one art form to another. My intention is not to reduce the different modes of expression to one common theory. But at

the same time, I do claim that verbal language is present throughout the whole process of art didactical work. The subjects are referred to as art *disciplines*, and a discipline always has a verbal-linguistic aspect as well. Not only, and not in every detail, but always in parallel. For it is not the case that the content of a craft object or a dramatic process is decided first, and then given a verbal-linguistic comment. It is more the case that verbal language becomes an integral part of a complex form of expression through work processes. Craft, music, drama, dance and literature do not exist in a vacuum. Even when we listen to music, it is meaningful to claim that we also listen through the earphones of verbal language categories. Verbal language is involved when we talk about, define, describe, argue, compare, quote and ask questions. Verbal language will therefore always be incorporated into and surround art disciplines – when art is created, in reception processes, in research processes and in supervision processes.

It is one of the challenges of art didactics to understand how verbal language can both support and act as a hindrance to other modes of expression. Verbal language is a lot of things. It can for example be used argumentatively, poetically and narratively. It can be used to both specify and obscure. But it can never replace other modes of expression. Verbal language cannot be used for just anything. On the contrary, words are important ‘because they are not the most important thing’ (Utaker 1992:37). The point is not that all work in the arts should be accompanied by and commented on in verbal language. Michel Foucault, for example, does not approve of too much commenting on artistic work (Bø-Rygg 1997). In contrast, this book builds on the premise that a verbal awareness *qualifies* art didactical work. This awareness is also about knowing about, being able to read, and being able to use rhetorical silence (Nyrnes 2007b).

But let us move on to concrete art didactics. And let us do so through rhetoric’s *topos* theory.

### **Topological thinking**

In the third act of Swan Lake, Odile, the black swan, dances 32 fouette pirouettes in a row. She dances alone, without a partner. It may not matter to the audience if the swan only pirouettes 29 times. In dance circles, however, this is one of the marks of quality of the dance. Dancing is about mastery, and one masters by being confident in the special places of dance. Such places are called *topoi*.

The concept of ‘*topos*’ (pl. ‘*topoi*’) is Greek, and it means place, or, to be more specific, ‘geometric place’ (Eide 1995). The Latin version is ‘*locus*’ (pl. ‘*loci*’). The concept



of topos is found in everyday words like ‘topography’ or ‘local’. A system of topoi is called a topology, which means places in verbal language, i.e. phrases, figures of speech and expressions that we often use. It resembles the walking trails in the Norwegian mountains waymarked by red Ts painted on rocks along the trail. Topoi are formulas that recur in text after text, those aspects of the text that are so established that we never think to question them, the basic techniques of the text that we hardly notice ourselves (Nyrrnes 2002). We have already visited, and explored, one such important topos in art didactics – i.e. the dichotomy between art and pedagogy. We thereby also understand that a discipline’s topoi are self-evident, and therefore highly formative and guiding in relation to the development of an argument. For example, it is on the basis of established topoi that we formulate the questions we consider worth asking in a discipline. As Wolrath-Söderberg wrote about the large project ‘Topical learning’: ‘[Topos theory has] pedagogical potential as a repertoire of tools for thought and tools for refining knowledge and critical thinking.’ (Wolrath-Söderberg 2006:72)

Topological thinking is a fundamental dimension of rhetoric (Nyrrnes 2007a), but it is also undercommunicated in rhetorical theory. Normally, we think of rhetoric as the art of persuasion, i.e. as strategic work using verbal language to convince in certain directions. And of course, rhetoric is persuasion. But verbal language is more than a strategic tool, it is also a space in which to express oneself; a space that exists before we start using language. This spatial dimension is important to understanding how verbal language works. In classical times, this space was homogenous, i.e. everybody more or less agreed on what cultural orientation should be about. Quintilian’s project was, as we remember, an orientation towards the surrounding world, finding one’s way around culture’s important places in order to know the terrain in which one was to work. In the multicultural society of today, there will be different topologies in which to orient oneself – or different discourses, as they are called in related forms of thought. According to rhetorical theory, it is a question of spatial orientation, familiarising oneself with important topoi.

But is art didactics not a distinct practice that should not concern itself with the commonplace and ordinary? Should it not be about creativity and creative ability? Is art not about going where no one has gone before, and not following in others’ footsteps? Deleuze and Guattari believe precisely that – that art has nothing to do with rhetoric (Deleuze & Guattari 1995:163-199). The perspective here is quite different. It is not about art as art, but more about how rhetorical insight can shed light on work processes in didactics for specific subjects that, if successful, can approach art itself. Art is a special practice. Nonetheless, work on artistic practices will be carried out in ways and in places that are recognisable from one

time to the next. This is also the case with dance. It is not until Odile knows the *topoi* of the dance that she can let go and throw herself into the dance.

In a rhetorical perspective, creativity is therefore about knowing topologies in order to be able to be innovative or choose new paths, because art practices are also topological; they contain patterns. There are many clichéd visual images, just as there are positions in ballet, conventions in guitar playing, conventions on how to recite poems and recognisable techniques in drama pedagogy.

Art didactics is about orienting oneself in topologies in order to transcend those same topologies. And there is good reason not to take this orientation too lightly. The topology of a discipline contains its fundamental ideas, which constitute the discipline. For example, when studying a topos as 'framing' in drama pedagogy, as one of the articles in this book does, one is exploring a highly established place of thinking, a place which – if we study it carefully – may help us understand more about what it is that the drama people actually do. It may also help them understand more about how they themselves think and work. For the culture of the discipline, the history of the discipline, the range of forms in the discipline – these things are hidden in the fixed places, in the discipline's self-evident conventions.

However – before we address the issue on an even more concrete level – where is the art in all these conventions? Art also consists of combinations of *topoi*. Perhaps art is about establishing new *relations* between *topoi*, not inventing new ones. And there is always an excess of material, of things that cannot be thoroughly analysed or planned for. The dancer practises places in the dance, the musician practises places in the notes, and creativity is demonstrated in how he or she combines these places. It is in this perspective that we can see montage as an art form – as it is described in an article in this book – a distinctive work of assembling text places in unusual ways, thereby challenging and problematising ordinary ways of organising or understanding the world.

What are these fixed places about? Topologies are formulas that recur from one text to another, or from one practice to another. So, by definition, a topological way of thinking contains a high degree of awareness of traditions. This is also evident in the texts in this book - a rhetorical orientation in art didactics will mean seeking out possible art didactical practices from the reservoir of tradition.

### **The material and the concrete**

Art didactics are concrete. They can be studied through small, local practices. The ballet girls tie on their new shoes and take the audience by storm. At the same time, they create ties

between themselves, the family audience at the bazaar and a whole dance culture of forms and history. Didactic work is about revealing these forms and this history, and about understanding how the forms and history function in the particular place and situation.

It is important, namely, in rhetorical thinking that local practices are situated, i.e. that they are linked to a place, a topographical place. In this place, some people are on home ground. They own the dress code, the rules for how to behave, the conversational form. And, as we all know, it matters whether you are playing at home or away. Understanding the local situation is to understand our ballet teacher's role in this rural community. In this way, art didactics can challenge cultural distinctions (Bourdieu 1995).

But what more do situations consist of? In art didactics we are often required to think in very concrete terms. Situations involving people are *bodily* situations. Body is voice, movement, rhythm – the subject is a physical self. In the discipline of drama, the body becomes part of an overall range of forms: the voices, words, roles, interactions – through everything from slapstick and comedy culture to disputes and rituals. But other art disciplines also work through the body: The musician's drawing of his or her bow, the reciter's breathing technique, the speaker's gestures, the rhythm of the author. Philosophical reflection also has a bodily materiality. For Barthes, it is about '*writing the body*' (Bø-Rygg 2006:21), for Benjamin – as we shall see in an article in this book – about daring to lose one's way.

The body works with a *material*. A costume, light, scenic space in a drama. Fabric, images, wood. The sound coming from musical instruments, the resonance of a voice. Or in combinations, as in the contributions in this book: illustrated books, pieces of music for the guitar, props in process dramas, the visual and phonetic aspects of a poem, the texture of wool and silk. Writing and speech. Always writing and speech *as well*. The different materials must be malleable, they become forms. The materials are formed in places: workshops, dance halls, listening rooms, drawing boards for standing elevation and sitting sketches. The material offers joys, drives, challenges, desire, fun, but also resistance, hard work, even grief. Writing grief. There are dance floors for reflection, written passages for desire, images intended just for fun. The material controls the situations, the material rules.

And situations have their own temporality. They are here-and-now projects. What is appropriate now? How is it done *here now*? What is a good text for an assignment in *this* particular teaching situation? Long thoughts and in-depth discipline studies must be translated into understanding of the moment. Situations require sound judgement in all these directions simultaneously: understanding what range of forms can be activated, reading the vocabulary in play, having good timing.

The concrete thus contains both a place, a situation, a body, a material and the shaping of this material. Rhetorical art didactics thinks by means of these concrete aspects. Thinking didactically in this way may seem simple. In many ways, it is contrary to our traditional understanding of didactics – as simplifying complex knowledge to pass it ‘down’ to the recipient. The opposite perspective is as necessary in rhetorical didactics – to identify and succeed in describing and developing complexity and variety in the seemingly simple. Becoming good at reading the topology of an arts discipline is about seeing how governing principles from cultural history, aesthetics and philosophy make the artistic style in which one works reveal its true self. Locally and in concrete terms. Such a reading requires and develops a form-oriented gaze, it develops ‘sensitivity to the surrounding world’ (Greve 1996:23).

### **The arts disciplines’ own terms**

A ballet teacher is good at other things than a classical guitarist. Each arts discipline – music, dance, drama, literature, art and craft – is a discipline on its own distinctive terms. This is self-evident, but it is also lost in the generic term ‘the arts’. Since Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote *Laokoon, oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* in 1766, we have become used to thinking in terms of a certain order – that some art forms, such as music and poetry, are temporary, while others, such as visual art and sculpture, are spatial. But art forms are not pure and distinct, either. The history of modernism is a history of transcending aesthetical boundaries in which the artistic modes of expression challenge us to think across boundaries and in combinations (Furuseth ed. 2005).

In this introduction, I have already problematised verbal language and insisted that it is an integral part of all arts disciplines. And I touched on how the rhetorical is expressed in both time and space, as a strategic and processual dimension, and a spatial and topological one. The main perspective in this book is topological, but it is evident, particularly in the texts on interpretative poetry recital and notes in practice, how critical the strategic dimension is if we are to see and understand what is happening. The rhetorical will thus be able to capture both the temporal and spatial aspects of the different art forms. However – how can art didactics be understood rhetorically, when the art forms themselves cannot be reduced to a rhetorical system of concepts?

This challenge can only be solved locally. But didactics for each individual subject must be developed *through* each art form's special combination of the verbal and the art form's own range of expression. In each example of art didactical practice it is a challenge to describe the special combinations of modes of expressions through what we could call art-

phenomenological sensitivity. In art and crafts, as in the interpretation of images, one has for example turned to semiotics as a way of thinking, or also to a theory of representation. The textual aspect is thereby given priority. The challenge of describing the formative force of, for example, an image cannot be solved by using rhetorical theory alone. But topological thinking brings out important aspects of, for instance, an exhibition, a form that is a basic didactic form in arts and crafts.

Art forms have their own range of expressions, but arts *disciplines* contain a lot of other things. Music is shaped sound. But the discipline of music is also the circle of fifths, notes and a set of technical concepts and concepts from the history of music – among other things. And these figurative forms between sound and everyday language are challenging material. The same can be said about the challenges of reading for example drama – literary fictions in combination with argumentative forms, framed in subtle combinations. It is not as simple as just classifying things into the categories of fiction and non-fiction. Each art form has its own range of expression within which to *carry out* difficult actions, ‘swan actions’. In addition, art *didactics* contains challenges from the pedagogical conceptual system, a set of understandings that I have already claimed are partly incommensurable with the distinctions of the arts disciplines themselves. Thinking for ourselves is a major challenge, because we think through culture’s forms.

The *history* of each individual arts discipline provides us with categories with which to read, watch and listen. But can we be certain that the periods of art history have been defined on the basis of the individual discipline’s own development? Could it be that the periods defined for one art form, for example literature, with its ‘baroque’, ‘classicism’, ‘romanticism’ and ‘realism’ have been forced on other art forms? Baroque literature and baroque music – the didactics, making us organise things in certain ways, are incorporated into the very concept of ‘baroque’. What would happen if, for example, we were to think topologically about various disciplines’ portrayals of themselves? Mari Lending has done so for the discipline of architecture (Lending 2007). Her history of architecture is not based on chronological periods, but more on the places, or *topoi*, of the architectural texts. The articles in this book could be the starting point for other arts disciplines’ topological explorations (see Nyrenes 2006a and 2006b).

This brings us to how didactic understanding – also based on the concrete – requires a *theoretical* perspective. But – some people might ask – why do we need theory in these practical disciplines? These arts disciplines are often called practical-aesthetical disciplines, as opposed to the so-called theoretical disciplines. In many ways, theory is *artificial*, a made-up

perspective on the world - a kind of *general* language, a language not linked to any particular example or case, nor any specific situation. And since artistic work is about creating the unique or special, how can it be systematic at the same time? How can theory be relevant or interesting to artistic work at all?

Of course, theory is also important to artistic disciplines. Because theory provides us with principles for ways of seeing, and focuses our attention on the specific. Theories can be seen in distinct discipline terminology with nuanced categories – whether it be in the range of types of pirouettes, nuances of sound in music, comparative figures in poetry, or colour scales in painting. Didactics is not about knowing theory for the sake of knowing theory. It is about having nuanced categories by which to read and guide practices. A teacher who sees differences can make a difference.

Emphasising theory strengthens the verbal language aspect of the arts disciplines. But, in a rhetorical perspective, there is also reason to claim that theory can be found in the art form's own modes of expression. One can quite simply imagine theory incorporated into the work of art itself. How should we understand this? The musician collects different recordings of the same symphony. The ballet girls rehearse the same positions day after day. The ceramist makes jugs – long series of almost identical jugs. Paul Cezanne painted Mont Saint-Victoire time after time. 'Painting can also be thinking – it is applying a theory in practice. The painter thinks in paintings,' said Merleau-Ponty about Cézanne (Bøe 2006:11). In rhetorical thinking, it is legitimate to talk about the *principles* that can be revealed in a series of works of art as a form of systematic language. Theory exists in the principles to be found in the series of examples at hand, and artistic reflection is thus shaped by the art form itself. To Benjamin – as we shall see in one of the articles – it is obvious that verbal language is an artistic material with which to think. In other art forms, working in series within a narrow framework, i.e. with clearly defined tasks, can create concentration and help to develop the ability to see poetic similarities and differences. Thus, important didactical consequences are an inherent part of the arts disciplines' own terms.

So far, we have described a rhetorical basis for art didactics. In any case, it is in workshops – working with wood, metals, fabric, sound design, music, drama, dance, speech, writing – in all kinds of workshops, in work with a material, that we find the centre of energy of art didactical practice. It is therefore time to proceed to the concrete.

### **Always new examples**

Art didactics is *in* concrete examples, incorporated into their own forms. As we know, good examples are greater than themselves: ‘And that is because what has happened tends to repeat itself,’ Aristotle wrote in his book *Rhetoric*. ‘But at the same time, no examples can become greater all by themselves.’ (Rimbereid 2006:31) The examples do not carry a ‘natural’ truth: such is TIE, interpretative recital, the exhibition as didactic form. But by always finding new examples, we can think through new forms, thereby developing and adding nuances to the idea.

What became of the pupils? What happened to the requirement that the pupil should be at the centre, and that each pupil should receive individually adapted tuition on his or her own terms? It is one thing that several of the texts are about the work of pupils and students. It is more important that all the texts are, in different ways, about reading. And the ability to read is the first prerequisite for all student work. Rhetorical art didactics does not teach us to read the pupil’s psychology, but it does teach us to read and develop the pupil’s modes of expression: gestures, movements, looks, words, texts. No more. But that is not so little after all, because texts and forms are not only about limited topics. Texts shape how we think and what we are capable of thinking about.

Rhetorical art didactics helps to legitimate the arts disciplines in a new way. They are not justified on the basis of the traditional formula of reason versus feeling, or conformity versus creativity, in which art was supposed to be responsible for the latter halves of these oppositions. On the contrary, one can claim that rhetorical art didactics develops – yes, precisely – *competence in reading*. Competence in reading is about precision, about details mattering, about forms being ways of organising things. Precision in details is at the core of the arts disciplines. That is where the *discipline* lies. And the arts disciplines’ work with nuanced forms – with the ‘many orderly possibilities of [dis]order’, as Ms Goga writes in one of the articles in this book. But is it such a big deal? Yes. It is a big deal. To learn how to read details is to learn how to read variety. It is to develop respect for differences. It is to train oneself to see how the culture’s weight and variations are incorporated into linguistic order, thereby shaping what we see.

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