

Looking at the Self in Society: Professional Perception and Midgroundable Roles in Community Theater

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ABSTRACT

The article looks at role socialization during a six-week community theater project for young adults lead by professional artists in Helsinki (2015–16). Using ethnographic data, the article examines the participants' experimentation with photography-based and videography-based techniques, which are used to source materials from the participants' own worlds of experience for the group's collective creative project. The article suggests that such tasks, along with their instructional discussions, serve to introduce the participants to role-specific forms of "professional perception." It is also argued that professional perception in the role of Artist functions in a distinctive "midgrounded" mode processing input from ongoing everyday experiences and activities in light of specific professional epistemologies. The process, then, involves significant changes in how the participants relate to their own identities and social environments.

This article examines how the participants of a six-week community theater project become socialized into the role of Artist by the professional leaders of the project.¹ The focus of the article is on how the group's photography- and videography-based tasks, along with related instructional

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1. The capitalization indicates that the designation refers to the local role manifested in the data of this study—as it is taught, learned, and enacted in this specific context (simultaneously acknowledging that the local role is related to similar cases elsewhere).

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discussions, serve to introduce the participants to specific professional modes of perception (see Goodwin 1994, 2000). Such tasks are used to source ingredients for the group's joint creative process from the participants' own worlds of experience. The participants' recordings are meant to capture significant fragments of their own identity while simultaneously making them useful for the collective creative process that aims to make the group's "joint voice" (*yhteinen ääni*) heard in society through the final stage performance. The project, then, relies on a particular understanding of creativity that emphasizes collective agency over individualist self-expression (cf. Wilf 2011, 2013; also Sawyer 2003, 16–33), and this understanding is reflected in the techniques examined in later sections.

The analyses show how the participants' observations of their worlds of experience in search of recordable objects become organized by professional epistemologies—that is, role-specific assumptions that specify the kinds of objects that should be looked for and the ways in which they should be dealt with (on roles and epistemology, see, e.g., Kockelman 2013, 125–29, 168–69; also Visakko, forthcoming). In addition, what is required from the participants is a particular kind of attitude that enables them to use their experiences and immediate social environments as ingredients of collective art making. Using ethnographic data, the article presents a detailed semiotic analysis of some of the concrete steps that may contribute to such changes. The aim is to conceptualize previously undiscussed dimensions of professional perception and to illustrate how professional perception in community art differs from, say, industrial and technological contexts (e.g., Ueno 2000; Arman and Styhre 2019), archeological contexts (e.g., Goodwin 2000), teacher education and vocational training (Seidel and Stürmer 2014; Hontvedt 2015), architecture and design (e.g., Styhre 2011; Caruso et al. 2019), or other art-related contexts (Wilf 2013).

There have been numerous attempts to theorize artistic processes in a way that transcends the vast variety of specific fields, methods, materials, conventions, and aesthetics (see Becker 1982). In particular, Dewey's ([1934] 2005) notion of art as reflection on and experimentation with human experience can be usefully applied to community art data. As is typical of many forms of community art, the tasks analyzed in this article are used to study the participants' identities and the group as a collective. The aim is to transform everyday experiences into recorded imagery that encapsulates the participants' worlds of experience and the underlying value hierarchies and contrasts. Importantly, the photography tasks and videography tasks extend the reflective and experimentative activities of the group from the training space to outside settings. Often the tasks take place in public places, and they may also involve interactions with the

public as part of the content. That is, ingredients for the group's joint voice are sourced from tasks that explore the participants' identities through their real-life situated manifestations.² Such artistic practices thus reflect an understanding of selfhood and individual identity as processes inherently embedded in everyday environments and social interactions (cf. Wilf 2011).

Therefore, it is useful to supplement the notion of professional perception with two other conceptual frames. First, it is characteristic of the role of Artist to manifest itself in two distinctly different modes. In a "surveillance" mode, the role stays in the background, continuously sifting and evaluating potential objects of experience. When a suitable object is found, the role becomes foregrounded in the form of practical interventions that enable the object to be arranged for recording. The nonforegrounded, but active, semiotic processes may be described as "midgrounded" (see Norris 2011, 47–50; cf. Goffman 1963, 43–63). A considerable amount of effort and attention may still be allotted to the midgrounded processes, although other interactional activities, organized by "everyday" roles, take center stage. One of the aims of the article is to show that professional perception in midgrounded modes is an important component of the role of Artist and has a key role in mediating between "everyday" and "artistic" processes.

Second, to account for how Artists concretely explore their environments during the tasks, we may utilize Kockelman's (2013, 183–99) metaphoric framework of travelers, terrains, maps, paths, and landmarks, which aims to model the spatiotemporal aspects of selfhood. In other words, a key manifestation of any identity consists in the routines, routes, and aspirations that one has within some ecological and sociocultural system (see also Bateson 1972). In the tasks examined later, for each participant, qua "traveler," the environment appears as a semiotic "terrain," a value-laden interpretation of the social, cultural, and physical characteristics of the environment, including the characteristics of other travelers. The same environment, such as the East Helsinki suburb where the group trained, then, can be quite different as a terrain for different participants. The East Helsinki suburbs, at least stereotypically speaking, have been known for tensions between the immigrant-background population and the Finnish-background population. Such stereotypes—in conjunction with personal experiences

2. In that sense they differ from many of the group's other activities, such as solo writing tasks that explore memory-stored or imagined experiences (see Visakko, forthcoming) and acting exercises—confined to the training space—that focus on stage presence and train the embodied capacity to portray fictive figures of personhood. Decontextualized, retrospective reflections on past experiences, then, have a limited function in the total division of labor among different techniques.

and orientations—position the participants differentially in relation to the environment. For instance, when moving around looking for objects of photography, the terrain is quite different for a Finnish-Somali female than it is for a Finnish male resident in that area. In order to plot paths or to spot landmarks in the terrain, the participants employ a semiotic “map,” or a set of ontological assumptions concerning how to navigate in the terrain. For different participants, then, both the terrain and the map may be quite different, with only a certain degree of overlap—but finding that overlap is one of the underlying goals of the project and part of the joint voice.

A key concern in the tasks analyzed later is how the recording as an artifact succeeds in capturing the experienced relations between persons and terrains and in communicating them to the intended audience. The analyses focus particularly on two overlapping aspects of the recordings—namely, the characterological and chronotopic indices they carry. “Chronotopic” here refers to the recognizable imagery of time and place mediated by the recording (see Agha 2007b). “Characterological,” in turn, refers to typifications of personhood that can be attributed to specific elements in the recording (see Agha 2005; 2007a, 177). In other words, the question is how a specific visual pattern becomes emblematic of a type of person situated in time and place for the intended audience, whether based on relations of elements within the recording itself or widely recognized stereotypes of personhood (see Agha 2007a, 242–50; Kockelman 2013, 74–80). The skill of professional perception in the tasks, then, ultimately turns on the challenge of recognizing recordable patterns that can be made to stand for specific contrasts of identity.

Moreover, inhabiting the role of Artist in public places and reframing everyday events into art-making events introduces the participants to new kinds of social challenges and may even involve bending the normal rules of social conduct (see Goffman 1963, 1974). Such activities, then, frequently have the characteristics of what Turner (1982) termed “liminoidity.” Liminoid activities aim to liberate the participants to some degree from prevailing social and psychological orders and allow for a creative manipulation of those orders—or even a subversion of old orders in favor of new ones.³ In a similar vein, Mead (1934,

3. Liminoidity refers to a category of social contexts marked by radical changes in the rules, orientations, and systems of classification and evaluation of social interaction. “Liminoidity,” in Turner’s account, differs from “liminality.” For Turner, liminal phenomena are prototypically associated with the obligatory, collective, and periodic rituals of traditional small-scale societies, whereas liminoid phenomena are prototypically associated with the relatively optional, individualistic, and marginal commodity-like activities of the industrialized and urbanized Western societies. According to Turner, both liminal and liminoid phenomena may be reflective and playful, or “metastructural,” in relation to prevailing social orders. Liminal phenomena may be

162–64, 209–11, 257) noted in modern art practices a “demand for the unconventional” in the sense that they aim to relieve the participants of the conventional “generalized others” whose attitudes they normally take into account in their behaviors. A specific kind of “artist’s attitude,” then, has been regarded as central for artistic practices. The premise of this article is that such attitudes grow from concrete role-mediated and epistemology-organized activities in which the participants relate in new ways to their environments and to others who perceive and evaluate their behaviors.

Such experimentative activities thus greatly benefit from professional skills. A community art project, where socialization begins from scratch, offers a concrete viewpoint on how such skills become transmitted. For most of the participants, it is their first time working in a professionally lead art project. The project marks the beginning of a transition from a mere audience member toward a professional art world participant. In addition to practical training, the transition requires a great deal of discursive work that makes explicit art-related conventions and aesthetic principles (see also Wilf 2011, 464). Some of this discursive work involves the kind of knowledge usually only possessed by art world insiders. Some of it involves making analytically explicit the kind of preexisting knowledge that most members of society learn implicitly through practical habituation as consumers of art (see Becker 1982, 46–50).

The following sections examine the relationship between two kinds of practices. The first analytical section looks at structured group discussions in which the participants are taught how to approach artworks and artistic processes analytically. These discussions represent the kind of discursive work that trains the participants’ professional perception before engaging in actual tasks out in the field. The subsequent sections then examine the participants’ own experimentations in which they try out some of the techniques for themselves and on their own worlds of experience. The analyses take a look both at the recording and reframing of relatively private events for subsequent public artistic purposes (videography-based techniques) and at the recording of “staged” public events that distinctly depart from everyday routines (photography-based techniques).

“inversive” (or “carnivalistic”) in the sense that they may momentarily reverse existing orders, but they are ultimately “eufunctional” and “ludergic.” That is, while being playful, they perform necessary cultural work and ultimately aim to maintain the existing order. Liminoid phenomena, in contrast, can sometimes be truly “subversive,” or “protostructural,” in the sense that they may disrupt existing orders and engender new ones. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Turner often lumps arts, sports, and games together as mere “leisure genres.” In the context of art, liminoidity seems to apply best to Western modern and contemporary art. The experimentative tasks of the community theater project may be regarded as “metastructural” in the sense that they comment on and, at least momentarily, rearrange the habitual, everyday structures of social situations.

Both kinds of tasks involve a midgrounded search for settings that might yield useful materials as evaluated through professional perception. However, in the first case, the search is directed toward familiar terrains and frequented landmarks (i.e., what the participants consider central to or illustrative of their identities), whereas in the latter case the focus is on unfamiliar or avoided parts of the terrain (i.e., settings that the participants do not belong to or aspire after). The final sections elaborate the main argument the article makes—namely, that the notions of midgrounding and professional perception can be used to clarify in detail how Artists are expected to relate to their surroundings and to their own identities.

Immersion into Art World Practices

The ethnographic data examined in this article were collected during a theater project organized by the Kiasma Theatre in Helsinki in the summers of 2015 and 2016. In cooperation with the city of Helsinki, the project hired 8–10 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 as salaried employees. The participants worked for about six weeks with professional artists and produced a piece for the URB Urban Art Festival. The project was led by professional artists, who also scripted the final piece using materials sourced from the participants. The participants contributed to the scripting process with their introspective writings, group discussions, and various tasks—e.g., in photography, videography, and painting—that explored the themes of the project. Some of the videos shot by the participants were also integrated into the final performance. Finally, the participants played the onstage roles themselves. The resulting pieces were stage performances, about thirty minutes in length, incorporating a collage of scenes often delivered as monologues in alternating turns that centered around a theme relevant for the group (e.g., the treatment of young people in working life and society, important turning points in life, central values and ideals). The project, then, may be described as a form of community theater or inclusive theater—in the broadest sense of the terms—influenced by the so-called devising method of collaborative art making (see, e.g., Oddey 1994). The data include field notes from the entire period, video recordings from selected days (about 150 hours), the materials produced by the participants during the project as well as feedback questionnaires, and initial and final interviews.

Both the summer job project and the URB festival have their origins in the outreach activities of the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art. Even before the summer job project started in 2011, the festival had pioneered in organizing workshops, performances, and other projects to employ young people, particularly

in the suburbs of East Helsinki.⁴ In 2011, the city of Helsinki agreed to join in to fund the salaries of eight summer employees. For the city, the project offered an alternative way of supporting young adults and introducing them to different options within the job market. Whereas the museum was interested in expanding its public and the impact of contemporary arts in the city, the city's focus was more on the practical prevention of youth unemployment and marginalization. Amid partially divergent interests, the leaders, in turn, adamantly emphasized the artistic goals of the group and made a point of treating the participants as budding artists. The leaders' vision was to produce a real piece of art that made the group's joint voice heard in society by dealing with social, political, and personal issues relevant for the group. The different expectations projected on the project occasionally lead to minor schisms, particularly between the leaders of the project and city officials, which nevertheless may have ultimately contributed to the group's internal coherence and personal commitment to art making. In a sense, the tasks examined in this article are precisely of the kind that most distinctly surpass the requirements of a "normal" summer job, as they involve in-depth sharing of personal experiences and engaging in out-of-the-common activities in public places. Participation in the tasks was more of a collective duty than an individual choice. In that sense, they differed, for instance, from commercially offered arts classes or workshops (cf. Wilf 2013).

One of the notable characteristics of the project was the multiethnic composition of the groups. As will be seen in some of the analyses, many of the participants, as well as some of the leaders, had an immigrant background with roots in, for instance, Somalia, the Middle East, Thailand, Russia, and Latin America. The groups thus combined Finnish-background and immigrant-background citizens, demonstrating the (new) ethnic spectrum of Finnishness through their composition alone. Moreover, a sufficient practical competence in the Finnish language was a requirement. In these aspects, the project differed from otherwise similarly minded projects that were going on at the same time, such as "documentary theater" projects directed at refugees and asylum seekers (see Lehtonen and Pöyhönen 2019). Although both kinds of projects centered around a "hybrid community of artistic expression" (ibid., 32 et passim) that aimed at interpersonal

4. The background of the summer job project is presented by producer Mikael Aaltonen in the preface of the project's self-published review (*Alkumetreillä. Väläyksiä erään teatterin ja kaupungin organisoimasta kesäduuniprojektista* [In the beginning. Flashes from a summer job project organized by a theater and a city], [2018]). As was touched on previously, East Helsinki is well known, among other things, for a higher than average rate of unemployment as well as a population base with a considerable portion of immigrants, although these social characteristics are not explicitly mentioned as reasons for targeting that particular region.

encounters and increased understanding across categories of identity, the project examined in this article focused on young citizens and their social awareness—encouraging new ways of looking at the self in society.

In addition, the leaders of the project had varying professional backgrounds. In fact, one of the official purposes of the project was to showcase different fields of art as a form of work and as employment options. The approach of the project was, therefore, necessarily quite eclectic. Maria, who had led the summer job project since 2011, had been trained in the Chekhovian tradition and had at one time worked as an actor and lately as a scriptwriter and as a director. Her changing working partners were trained in different fields of art. Mikko (participated in 2014–16), a visual artist, was in charge of instructing the participants on the principles and techniques of videography during the project. Niina (participated in 2015), a painter and visual artist, in turn, had an important role in the photographic assignments.⁵ Just as the participants assumed multiple roles during the project (in particular those of Employee, Artist, Performer, and Character), the leaders, correspondingly, inhabited a number of complementing roles (in particular those of Employer, Mentor, Scriptwriter, and Director). In the activities examined in this article, the role of the leaders might be best described as that of a supporting and instructing Mentor. Whereas, for instance, the relationship between the Director and the Performers is relatively hierarchical and disciplined and the role of the primary leader becomes more pronounced (cf. Kramer 2006), the relationship between Mentors and mentored Artists is relatively symmetrical and egalitarian. As Mentors, the leaders together act collegially as advanced and experienced Artists who care for and assist in the individual development of fledgling Artists. The role of Artist thus enables the cultivation of a personal vision of and taste in art, whereas the role of Performer focuses more on the interdependence and disciplined interactions between individuals putting up a performance (cf. Ochs et al. 1996, 10, 40–41). As will be seen in the following section, the photography- and videography-based tasks were usually assigned and instructed through practical mentoring activities, such as detailed group discussions that served, first, to introduce the participants to more precise ways of perceiving and conceptualizing artistic processes and, second, as a source of activating and exemplifying models for the group's own creative process.

5. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article for both the leaders and the participants, but, by their own request, the real names of two of the professional artists are mentioned here: "Maria" is Elina Izarra Ollikainen, and "Mikko" is Sauli Sirviö.

Discussing Works of Art and Art as Work

A pervasive and recurring type of socialization into art world practices during the project consisted of conversations structured around works of art. In such conversations, the group reflected on art as professional process and as personal experience by studying the production and interpretation of artworks together. The leaders demonstrated by their example how to approach the contents and the compositions of artworks in analytical, evaluative, and contextualizing terms, and the participants were encouraged to start articulating and justifying their own views. From the very beginning, the challenge of describing art in linguistic terms became highlighted. For instance, in one specific early exercise, while visiting a museum of contemporary art, the participants had to describe a series of artworks to their blindfolded pairs (July 2, 2015). After the task—which turned out to be quite challenging—Niina discussed each artwork with the group explaining (1) how the works had been made, (2) what, in her opinion, was worthy of attention in each work, and (3) what justified their classification as “art.” Simultaneously, she exemplified the kinds of discursive descriptions that could have been given for each work. The exercise, then, sets the stage for the realization that the ways in which art is perceived and the ways in which it is talked about are interlinked.

Importantly, in such discussion, the participants learn how professional artists articulate stances toward artworks and how such stances differ from those of nonprofessionals. It becomes clear early on that professionals tend to focus on the meanings, purposes, and technical aspects of the observable components of the artwork rather than mere subjective preferences. Let us consider the following summary of a ten-minute segment in which Maria delves into an analysis of a photographic exhibition she had seen some time ago (July 8, 2015). The description of the discussion is here punctuated into five phases:

1. In her brief introduction, Maria links the upcoming discussion with the group’s theme “belonging” (*kuuluminen*). She explains that her aim is to show how the theme of belonging was handled by a professional photographer in a recent exhibition (Susanna Kekkonen’s *Family Album*). The work in question consists of photographs of divorced families coauthored by a child of the family who got to select who was included in the picture and how they were organized, giving the power of decision making now to the children who had none when the family broke up. Maria draws particular attention to how the details of the photographs reflect the personal experience of what a family is and who is seen as belonging to a family.

- 2a. Maria reads several passages from a book in which the child coauthors reflect on the images and explain their compositional choices and underlying motives. Simultaneously, she shows the corresponding photographs on a computer screen or from the book.
- 2b. While reading, she occasionally points to details in the images or stops to comment on them. She highlights areas and elements relevant to the discursive descriptions in the passages and raises questions of framing, posing, and the selection and organization of components.
3. Maria ends the series of examples with what she seems to regard as a particularly effective one. In the book passage, the child explains the positioning of her family members (e.g., who was placed in the back row, who in the front) and pays attention to who is smiling and who is not while analyzing the reasons. The image thus becomes discursively reframed as a diagram of personally experienced social relations. The child notes that the image encapsulates the emotional tensions within the family during the past nineteen years, but, despite (or even because of) the conflicting experiential elements, her own smile is genuine. That is, she acknowledges the fact that the concept of the artwork enabled the event to take place in the first place and turned the conflicting elements into a harmonious whole, which otherwise would not have happened. Such aspects of her commentary point to the photograph's transformative and metaphorical potential showing how it is iconic of some higher-level dimension beyond the perceivable elements of the recording itself. After reading from the book, Maria sums up her own reactions. She notes how the experience of belonging is very tangible in the photograph and describes the project as "excellent" (*hieno*) and the exhibition as "very touching" (*tosi koskettava*). We see, then, that the semiotic texture of Maria's analysis so far interlinks (1) the general concept of the artwork, (2) perceivable relations between segments of the photograph, (3) an analysis of the underlying biographical facts and emotional dynamics, and (4) a description of her own emotional response. Consequently, an underlying dimension of her presentation consists in explaining how specific visual elements may invite specific characterological interpretations.
4. Maria ends up presenting one final example. Here, the child explains that her alienated biological father is not in the picture and she would not even know where to situate him, suggesting that perhaps only half of him would be in the photo. Maria invites the group to imagine the alternative and the kinds of meanings it would convey:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | seki on jotenki mielenkiintone et | that too is somehow interesting like |
| 2 | tavallaan mitä se kuva kertoo et mitä | kind of what the picture tells like what |
| 3 | jos isä oliski täs kuvas puolikkaana | if the father was in this picture as a half |
| 4 | tai et miten me luetaan kuvaa | or like how we read a picture |

Besides conceptually experimenting with an alternative composition and framing for the particular photograph, she explicitly classifies such processes more generally (lines 2 and 4) as the Artist's skill of "reading pictures."

5. While closing the discussion, Maria retrospectively frames it as one instance of "input" ("yeah so that was one thing, an input for you on belonging" [joo mut tämmönen yks juttu, syöte teille kuulumisesta]), positioning the previous segment within a sequence of parallel segments.

Indeed, shortly afterward, the group discusses a different set of photographs (David Magnusson's pictures of fathers and daughters at purity balls). Maria and Niina first discuss the cultural context of the pictures and the various choices behind their composition (e.g., setting, clothing, poses). Mikko then joins in to comment on the demanding technological aspects (e.g., type of camera, shutter, and film, time of exposure in bright light) that enable the capturing of what he describes as "really harmonious moments" (tosi harmoninen hetki noissa kaikissa). In other words, he links his own aesthetic evaluation with an explanation of the technical procedures behind the effect. Maria praises Mikko's comment ("it's wonderful that you bring in this technological aspect" [mahtavaa et sä tuot tähän tän teknisen näkökulman]) marking for the whole group the importance of dialogue between artists from different fields as well as foregrounding once more the organic link between the technical and the aesthetic.

Even on the basis of such short passages we see that, in such social interactions, the photographic artifacts become metasemiotically decomposed (1) into the kinds of semiotic conditions that lead to their existence (e.g., personal experiences, expressive purposes and thematic motifs, skills of composition, camera techniques) and (2) into the kinds of semiotic consequences that they can give rise to (e.g., aesthetic effects when "read" by viewers, evaluative and analytical stances based on such effects). The role of Artist becomes associated with specific kinds of evaluative stances, which, in turn, require specialized evaluative techniques, such as professional perception of artworks and expert knowledge of artistic processes.⁶

6. Such capacities—and differences between different types of artists—sometimes become explicitly noted in passing. For instance, Mikko makes a comment about his own "photographer's brain" (valokuvaajan aivot) (July 9, 2015) and how it affects his approach to composition. Moreover, Maria and Mikko often playfully

In addition to introducing the participants to specific discursive practices and underlying epistemological structures, the discussions about artworks and artistic processes are treated as points of comparison that illustrate how the group's theme can be handled and as catalysts that may give rise to new ideas for the group's own tasks. It is noteworthy that—as was seen in phase 5 above—the term *input* (*syöte*) becomes part of the group's own self-organizational metadiscourse; that is, it is used to reflexively mark specific activities as particularly relevant for an ongoing or forthcoming creative task. Indeed, many tasks are preceded by a whole series of activities that prepare the participants thematically and technically for upcoming tasks by exploring artworks or potential ideas for artworks (e.g., interesting sites or incidents, media narratives, or personal biographies).⁷ Such input, structured by mentoring discourse, then, is an important means of training professional perception. The following analyses examine how the fruits of the training are taken to the field in hands-on tasks.

Recording and Reframing Experiences

This section examines the videography- and photography-based techniques that were used to transform objects of personal experience into ingredients of artworks during the project. As video and photography equipment are easily portable, they could be carried along and used quickly to record spontaneously occurring events or events expressly staged for the sake of being recorded. Video, in particular, was often used to record events that took place during the “free” time of the participants (i.e., as off-duty or nonactive Employees). The role of Artist, in other words, was not confined, temporally, to the working hours or, spatially, to the premises of the theater project. Moreover, videography- and photography-based techniques were typically employed while embedded in everyday terrains. That is, they were used to source materials from significant events “outside” and brought back “inside” to the training space where they were further analyzed and reframed in terms of their value for the creative project of the group. Thus, the notion of midgroundable roles is of particular importance to these kinds of tasks. The midgrounded surveillance mode enables the participants

tease each other about the differences between visual artists and theater makers in perceiving the world and in approaching artistic composition.

7. To be even more precise, the discussions about the photographic works in the previous section were simultaneously input in themselves (i.e., points of comparison directly related to the group's creative process and its theme), a reflection (“post-input”) on a previous input task, in which the participants themselves took photographs (see the next section on recording and reframing experiences), and “pre-input” for a specific videotaped conversation task. In other words, the contrastive sequencing and cumulative interplay of different input activities is in itself another level of input, in which the different activities cross-modally complement, contrast with, and contextualize aspects of one another.

to engage in everyday activities while evaluating the perceivable aspects of the ongoing events in terms of their potential for conveying something significant about the participant. The artifacts produced during the tasks, then, are simultaneously iconic of specific object events, which they immediately represent, and of the participants' own identities, the structure of which they ultimately aim to communicate.

Photographic Experimentation with Everyday Experience

The photography assignments were usually undertaken in a variety of urban settings near the training space of the group in East Helsinki. This section looks at an assignment that studies the theme of "not belonging" or the "lack of belonging" (*kuulumattomuus*). When assigning the task, Niina instructs the participants to have themselves photographed in a setting that they "do not belong to" but to "stage" (*lavastaa*) the situation so that it appears as if they did belong there (July 8, 2015). The starting point of the task, then, is a simple discursive formulation that loosely categorizes the type of social setting that the participants are supposed to reach as their final destination. The participants' self-conceptions form the basis of the map that serves as the means of identifying the kinds of places that might satisfy the destination criteria. From these points of departure, each participant must plot paths through the terrain in search of potential settings of "not belonging." In the beginning, then, the task is a spatially oriented process of self-evaluation (indeed, a kind of "self-orienting").⁸

Most of the pictures were taken at a nearby shopping mall or in its vicinity. For example, Razan, a Syrian-born female, had herself photographed with a butcher behind a butcher's counter. Amina, a Finnish-Somali female, had her picture taken with a group of white locals (see fig. 1). Her sister Nimo appeared in her photograph with an elderly Finnish lady. Sami, a Finnish male, decided to be photographed as a florist at a florist's stand. Henry, of Thai-Finnish descent, was photographed as a mannequin at the display window of a clothing store. Elisa, a Finnish high school student, said she was originally looking for "winos" (*spurgut*) but had to settle for a young father with a baby carriage. Carlos, of

8. One might say that the task is a game of "existential rationality" (see Kockelman 2013, 183–99). The participants, or travelers, are supposed to use their maps in a way that distinctly departs from their everyday uses. Usually travelers tend to use their maps precisely so as to find terrains that they belong to, or long for. In this game, one is looking for landmarks and other travelers that one would normally evade and paths that one might not normally dare to take. What departs from everyday contexts in the game is not so much the map itself as the way that it is used in relation to the terrain. At the same time the game may "proto-structurally" transform the map, as new territories become charted and old contours become specified, thus giving rise to changes that may affect one's everyday life as well.



Figure 1. Amina's photograph (photograph by the author)

Finnish and Latin American descent and a self-avowed absolutist, was photographed in a bar (see fig. 2).

The selection of potential settings of photography is determined by various levels of the participant's experience. The visual requirements of the task dictate that there must be some salient incongruence—that is, some intersubjectively perceivable contrast in terms of social attributes or relations, such as an ethnic difference. However, the underlying affective attitude, which ultimately draws the participant toward that particular setting, may as well be one of affinity or curiosity (e.g., Henry, Nimo) as one of aversion or alienation (e.g., Carlos, Elisa?). From the spectator's standpoint, ambiguity in terms of whether the participant would like to belong to that setting or social category (e.g., Razan, Sami, Amina) might be what makes a photograph particularly interesting.

As Niina noted in her instructions, the assignment involves relatively “staged” events. The precise point is to record the kind of event or interpersonal encounter that otherwise would most likely never occur. Moreover, the objects of photography are arranged in specific compositions, and the people being



Figure 2. Carlos presenting his photograph (photograph by the author)

photographed pose for the photographer. The event of recording momentarily interrupts, or merges with, the event being recorded. That is, the recording intervention temporarily foregrounds the role of Artist, making the technical activities focal and dominant. Thus, the photographs are staged in the sense that the combination of persons in specific environments is so constructed that it purposefully departs from everyday frames of social interaction. It is the interaction with the Artist—on and off film—that gives rise to the transformation of frames. Nevertheless, the encounters between the Artist and the other persons *per se* are quite real—unlike, say, those between “fictive” onstage characters—and accessed and arranged via everyday social relations; a challenge that we return to shortly. In fact, it might be better to say that such experiences are elicited on account of a creative process, rather than staged.

The recording phase of the task is visually oriented. Since the aim is to find settings that the participants themselves can turn into recording-worthy events through their physical presence, the task directs the participants’ attention to the visual aspects of their everyday terrains. The participants must find a setting where they—by virtue of their own characterological traits—can create a perceivable incongruity, an iconic representation of their “not belonging” there. First, they must reflect on the intersubjectively perceivable indices of identity

both in themselves and in their environments: what it is about themselves that spectators, too, can interpret as incongruent with some aspect of the terrain. In addition, the task evokes aesthetic decisions, such as what is interesting enough for others' vision and for the joint creative process, what perceivable qualities look good in a photograph, and how to frame and to compose the picture. That is, the task links a reflection of the participant's identity with incipient technical and aesthetic considerations. This is, then, an example of the kind of process through which the capacity of professional perception becomes trained and internalized during the project, and, in this case, the capacity turns on the observation of significant incongruities.

Let us look at two examples and the kinds of chronotopic and characterological indices they carry in more detail. One centers around race and the other one around alcohol consumption—both culturally salient and contentious themes. Amina's photograph (fig. 1) portrays her in friendly physical contact with a group of white locals whose habitus implies a lower rather than higher socioeconomic status. The picture relies on contrasts of stereotypic characterological indices that are presumed to be intersubjectively recognized by the anticipated audience. Some of them are embodied and hard to conceal, such as skin color and texture or other physical features that can be read as signs of ethnicity or lifestyle. Some of them appear to be deliberately presented stylings of a specific social type (e.g., the person's general "look" including appurtenances and accessories). Other indices may be more or less inadvertently "given off," such as habitual aspects of clothing, hairstyle, gestures, or postures that can be read as signs of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Since the participants cannot actually see themselves while planning the photograph, they need to rely on their self-conceptions as a frame that organizes the perceptual field and projected contrasts with others (cf. Ueno 2000). Only a contrast that is evaluated as perceptible and significant enough to others becomes eligible as an object of photography. Or, to return to the map metaphor, the relative distance or gradient between the contrasting indices must be of a significant degree on others' presumed maps (see Kockelman 2013, 190). As was mentioned previously, the East Helsinki terrain itself portends, at least stereotypically speaking, the possibility of racist attitudes or conflicts between Finnish-background and immigrant-background groups, which makes the amiable contact depicted in the photograph even more significant.⁹

9. Moreover, the nearby plaza was at the time associated with small-scale demonstrations by several right-wing nationalist groups and their supporters, and at least one such demonstration occurred during the project.

It is also noteworthy that Amina bravely approaches a group of strangers (who, according to her, had been fighting over a cigarette just a moment earlier). In Goffman's (1963, 89, 128–48) terms, she seeks “face engagement” with a group with whom she is not on mutually “open” terms. That is, they are mutually unacquainted and do not share membership in any specific group or identity category. Despite being a plaza, the environment is not in any obvious sense an “open” place either where anyone would have a right to initiate an engagement with others (unlike, say, a bar might be). The default expectation, therefore, is that the two parties are not readily accessible to each other and instigating an encounter is a marked act that stands in need of specific reasons. To some degree, Amina even flouts the conventions associated with such encounters with her out-of-the-ordinary request. The result, then, is a representation of an encounter that genuinely crosses habitual boundaries within the social and ecological system that the persons inhabit—and it may even call into question some of their habitual assumptions about one another (see also Bateson 1972, 287–301; Kockelman 2013, 91–95).

In contrast, the incongruity that Carlos wishes to portray—an absolutist who never visits bars visiting a bar (see fig. 2)—relies more intricately on the values and habits of an individual identity. For others, the incongruity does not have a visible manifestation (except for those who know the individual in question). Therefore, he must foreground an additional visual element that makes the incongruity inferable to others. In the picture, he is holding a water bottle on the bar, thus standing out from typical customers. Simultaneously, he contrastively invokes the stereotypic figure of a heavy-drinking Finnish bar goer. In the subsequent group discussion, the meaning of the photograph was not immediately evident for the others, and Carlos had to explain the motivation behind it and to correct a suggested interpretation that was slightly off the mark. In strict contrast to Amina's case, the only person Carlos had to interact with was the bartender, whose permit for the photograph was asked. Bartenders, however, are professionals who are by default “exposed” for others to approach (see Goffman 1963, 125–28), and bars are places that are automatically accessible to anyone of a legal age. The only deviation from the ordinary was the specific nature of Carlos's business (in which the bartender had no specific interest or stake anyway). Carlos's photograph, then, ends up emphasizing different “systemic” dimensions than Amina's. It illuminates the relation of an individual identity to a specific public locale and the value-laden nature of such locales as landmarks in a terrain. Similarly, the two examples employ different strategies of producing incongruities that are emblematic for the intended audience.

Once finished, the participants' contributions were—as always—discussed together and analyzed from a variety of technical and aesthetic standpoints, including how they could be subsequently reframed as ingredients of a work of art. While the group examines and discusses the pictures, the question of “what it is like to talk to strangers” (*millaista on puhua tuntemattomille*) comes up prominently. The group starts retrospectively offering social and psychological support for one another. Nimo, for instance, tells the others that she had been quite nervous to begin with and that three people had refused her request even though she had told them that it is an “art photograph.” This leads to a brief sequence in which the leaders reflect on the ethical question of “using” other people for one's artistic purposes.¹⁰ The lesson, in any case, is that an Artist needs a specific set of social skills to arrange recordable events by recruiting other people—and being able to verbalize explicitly the purpose of the activity, both to oneself and to others, is essential for the justification of such activities.

To take up a similar example, a week later the participants were assigned to take “trick photographs” of one another by manipulating the framing and the perspective of the photograph. One of the participants, for instance, had to crawl on concrete stairs while another one was taking the picture to make it look like the person was unnaturally crawling upward and upside down. A passerby had got alarmed, approached them, and asked if they needed an ambulance, to which the other participant had promptly replied that “this is art.” Similarly, when the photographs were later viewed and discussed together, a participant from a different group noted, in a humorous tone, when commenting on a potentially embarrassing or challenging task, that they were willing to do “anything for the sake of art.” He later explained that his comment, in fact, echoed a similar comment from one of the leaders. We can see, then, an incipient awakening to the kinds of possibilities that appealing to art making entails. Being genuinely able to commit to the role of Artist and to justify one's entitlement to the role may encourage one to undertake actions that would normally be considered impossible, whether socially or psychologically. The socialization process indeed seems to involve a change in the participants' attitudes toward social norms and others' attitudes, as well as in their orientation to their environments. In fact, the utility of professional perception ultimately depends on attitudes that enable the foregrounded recording activities. As was seen, the same kinds

10. Maria notes that she, too, might think twice before accepting such a request from someone, particularly if her family were involved. Mikko recounts an anecdote from his days as an art student when he had an assignment with similar challenges. He, in contrast, concludes that in the end people are usually quite consenting to being photographed—if one finds the right way of dealing with them.

of discursive processes that were used to train the capacity could also be drawn on to justify the foregrounded activities.

Videographic Samples of Worlds of Experience

Unlike the photography tasks, the videography assignments were mainly used to record nonelicited events—that is, the kinds of events that would or might have occurred despite the act of recording—and the choice of subject matter was usually relatively free for the participants. They even had access to action cameras that do not limit the physical behaviors of the user and allow for the recording of activities while immersed in those activities. The equipment enabled the participants, for instance, to shoot point-of-view recordings of actual events from their everyday lives. Such recordings thus offer relatively direct audiovisual access to the participants' private worlds of experience. In other words, in the cases examined in this section, midgrounding serves to extend the role of the Artist to a new class of experiences in new kinds of terrains. The aim of professional perception, in turn, is to learn to recognize significant private events that can be made to stand for broader themes relevant for the joint project and the final public performance.

Some of the videos ended up being merely used as input for the group's discussions.¹¹ Some, in contrast, were worked into the final pieces of 2015 and 2016. In the process, the participants had the chance of concretely witnessing how their own contributions were edited and integrated into the artwork by the leaders. Table 1 presents some examples from two participants from different projects.

As the examples show, there are, on the one hand, recordings of habitual activities that the participants engage in regularly in their everyday lives and consider particularly significant, such as Sami's video of the kind of nightly biking tour through an empty city that he finds comforting and liberating (1). The recording captures not only a valued type of activity but also a preferred type of

11. For instance, one of Sami's videos featured a few of his friends discussing different art forms at some length while hanging out. One of the people on the video, a rapper, condemns modern art as "crap." This strict opinion became the focus of the discussion after the group viewed the video (July 15, 2015). Both the leaders and the participants raised a number of counterarguments, but one of the leaders also commended the rapper's opinions as "well built" (*hyvin rakennettuja mielipiteitä*), highlighting the importance of the rational justification of opinions. Another leader, in contrast, remarked that from an interactional standpoint the opinion is still a "rejection" (*tyrmäys*) that may cause the interlocutors to "lock themselves away" (*lukita*) and stop listening. Finally, the leaders encouraged the participants to envision how they would respond to the rapper in video format. Once again, then, such input conversations serve to model professional ways of talking about art in a dialogical relation to contrasting voices. This time, however, the discussion centered on a recorded event from the actual world of experience of a participant, gradually bringing the professional processes ever closer to the participants.

Table 1. Examples of the Participants' Videos Used in the Final Performances

Video Content in the Final Piece	Event of Recording
1. A point of view shot of someone racing through the city streets in the night.	Sami doing one of his regular biking tours with an action camera (2015).
2. A young man, recognizable as one of the performers, laying on a bunk in army clothes while others are heard singing a tune in the background. In a voice-over interview segment, the performer reflects on his army experience.	A free moment at the barracks with fellow conscripts recorded by Sami during his brief stay in the army before a deferment was granted (2015).
3. A young woman, potentially recognizable as one of the performers, whirling around on a children's merry-go-round in the dark making a funny noise (looped).	Miina gathering with friends in a park after a night out and fooling around with a merry-go-round, recorded by a friend (2016).
4. Abstract patterns of light and color against a dark background.	A streetlamp in the night shot by Miina (2016).

path in a terrain. Such videos are, in other words, selected instances of the types of processes that the participants regard as central to their identities and wish to share with others. On the other hand, there are recordings of chance occurrences deemed potentially useful to the group's creative process, whether by the participants themselves or by the leaders, such as unexpected social incidents (2, 3) or merely interesting visual qualities encountered in one's environment (4). For instance, one of Sami's videos was recorded during his brief but highly unexpected experience in the army in the middle of the project (see fig. 3).¹² Such examples demonstrated very concretely to the entire group that even setbacks and surprises can be turned into ingredients of artworks.

When the participants' videos are reframed and embedded in the semiotic texture and structure of an artwork, they acquire new layers of meaning. The relationship between the original context of recording and the final context of embedding may vary widely. Sometimes the aim is that the person represented on the video remains recognizable as one of the participants on stage (see table 1, ex. 2; and fig. 3). Often, however, this is not necessary, as the precise aim is to re-frame the recorded events so that they point to more general types of events, settings, or identities, with which the audience can identify. In other words, the videos

12. Sami, according to his own words, had forgotten about his conscription process and was forced to report to military service in the middle of the project. The experience lasted only a few days, as he was granted a deferment and was able to return to the project. The filming in the army was suggested by the leaders who also equipped Sami with the camera. The choice of filmed events, however, was Sami's based on his own judgment (since filming in such settings might not have been looked on favorably by the army).

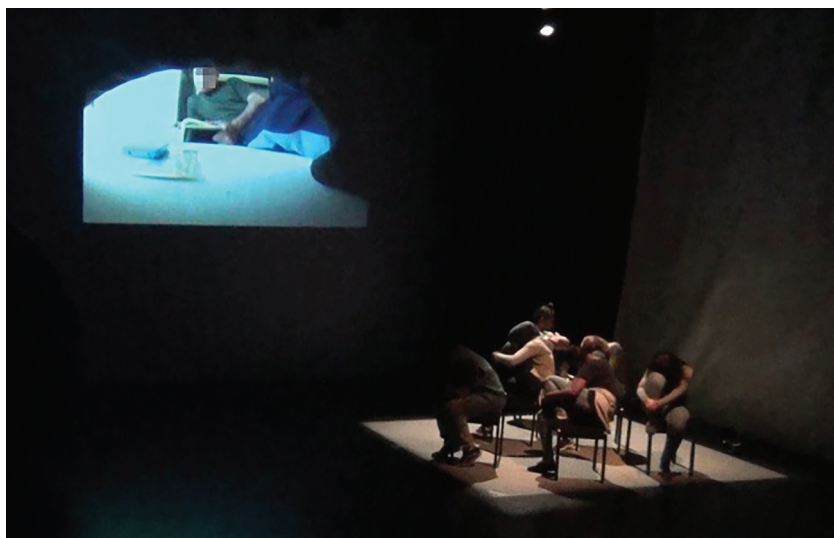


Figure 3. Sami's video (no. 2) used in the final performance (photograph by the author)

become dissociated from the particular individuals and the particular events that were originally recorded. Let us take, for instance, example 3 in table 1. When embedded in the final piece, the video is no longer primarily a representation of a particular past event but, rather, a representation of a type of circumstances (e.g., a young person having tired but creative fun) that simultaneously becomes construable in more metaphorical terms on the basis of its position within the piece (e.g., the “whirling” may be seen as an allegory of both the elation and confusion of youth).

We may itemize in more detail the different dimensions of professional perception that are relevant in the cases above. First, a recording should be selected and composed so that its chronotopic content, the semiotic imagery of time and place it mediates, becomes sufficiently recognizable and construable from the spectators' standpoint. In other words, a particular object of experience situated in a particular terrain is suitable for recording insofar as it can be transformed via the recording into a more general message about a type of terrain—or mapped onto a socioculturally shared typology of terrains. We may say, then, that professional perception in this case involves the capacity to recognize in objects of personal experience their potential for “chronotopic generalization.”

Second, a recording should contain characterological indices that can be mapped onto socioculturally shared typologies of personhood by the audience. A particular object of experience, reflecting a particular subject's perspective, is

suitable for recording insofar as it can be transformed via the recording into a more general message about sociocultural types of personhood and categories of identity. We may say that professional perception in this case involves “characterological generalization.” From this standpoint, an Artist is someone who has the capacity to perceive their own objects of experience as instances of more general types and to impersonalize them into ingredients of more complex, inter-subjectively communicable meaning structures.

However, the reverse of such generalization functions as an alternative strategy of professional perception in the task above. This process that might be called “phenomenological particularization,” as it involves the reduction of some object of experience to its singular phenomenological qualities. In such cases, the aim of the recording is merely to capture the perceivable audiovisual characteristics of an individual object. The object of experience is not treated as an instance of recognizable types but as a mere carrier for patterns of qualities that can be abstracted from it for further aestheticized usages. The recordings may be used, for instance, as elements of staging to create a specific mood or atmosphere (see table 1, ex. 4; and fig. 4). Moreover, when the patterns of audiovisual qualities are incorporated in the structure of the piece, they readily derive more abstract symbolic meanings from the contiguous elements (e.g., reflecting the mental states of the characters or specific dramatic turning points).

Generalization and particularization may be seen as mutually complementing technical dimensions of an Artist’s professional perception. The two modes



Figure 4. Miina’s video (no. 4) used in the final performance [photograph by the author]

of perception draw attention to different ontological aspects of an object of personal experience. Particularization is a close examination of the object's individual qualities and the aesthetic affordances they provide. Generalization is an exploration of the systemic aspects of the object of experience—that is, its relation to some ecological and sociocultural system (see Bateson 1972, 144–52). Both generalization and particularization, then, tend to direct attention to characteristics that are beyond the everyday meanings habitually given to such objects by the observer.¹³

Professional Perception and Midgroundable Roles

The analyses above have shown that a key manifestation of the role of Artist is a specific attitude vis-à-vis one's own identity and world of experience. Being an Artist involves an observation of one's experiences with a view to recording, modifying, and reframing them with specific techniques in order to make them useful in creative processes. In a sense, then, the core of the role of Artist consists in the capacity to relate to one's own experiences instrumentally in order to transform them into components of artworks—simultaneously offering something of value to a collective process and for others to witness (cf. Diba and d'Oliveira 2015, 1358–59). Drawing on Goodwin's (1994, 2000) notion of “professional vision,” it was argued above that the role of Artist involves a particular kind of “professional perception.” Professional perception in the examples involved three stages: locating a potential terrain, identifying a visual pattern, and anticipating the recorded result and its further usability. Development presumably first occurs in the former, more intuitive and immediately situated processes and progresses toward the latter, more technical and inferential stages (cf. Seidel and Stürmer 2014; Caruso et al. 2019, 61).

In the first stage of professional perception, Artists reflexively observe their own perceptions and selectively engage with whatever appears valuable and useful in light of professional criteria, the specificity of which increases with

13. An analogous class of tasks should be briefly mentioned here. These cases do not involve videography or photography, but they train a complementary dimension of professional perception, which might be termed the “narrative elaboration” of everyday objects of experience. For instance, the participants were once given a writing task in which they had to fabricate fictive backstories for artifacts found in their everyday environments (e.g., where they had come from, whom they had belonged to, what narratively significant events they had been involved in). One might say that such tasks activate the inferential aspects of professional perception, as they consist in imagining a temporal and causal chain of past events and social relations—or a trajectory through a terrain—on the basis of an actual situated object of experience. Together with the photography- and videography-based tasks discussed above, they train the capacity to see meaningful potential in objects of everyday experience beyond their obvious perceptual forms and routine-like framings.

advancing socialization and accumulating experience. Professional perception, in other words, is based on technical and aesthetic epistemologies that specify the kinds of semiotic representations one aims to produce of one's own experiences. Where photography as a medium centrally turns on vision and still images, videography-based tasks involve both visual and auditory perception and moving images. However, as was seen in the examples, the underlying process of identifying suitable object experiences involves a more complex, situated perception and reflection of one's identity. For instance, the process of locating or eliciting an event of "not belonging," which is a prerequisite for recording such an event, may involve many types of perceivable qualities, whether visual, auditory, olfactory, haptic, kinesic, proprioceptive, interoceptive, or any combination thereof (see also Wilf 2013, 141). Often privately experienced affective interpretants (i.e., emotional responses) are key signs of "not belonging."

In midgrounded modes, the process of identifying and highlighting suitable visible patterns remains highly introspective. To take up a point of comparison, in the Israeli poetry workshops studied by Wilf (2013), cardboard frames were used as a technical instrument for reorganizing the perceptual field. They were used to isolate and foreground specific elements in the environment (e.g., a nail stuck in a stone wall) so that they—and their internal structures—could then become the objects of more intense scrutiny and poetic description. In the tasks examined above, the selection of object experiences relied on few objective grids, standards, or coding schemes but, rather, on an intersubjective calibration of one's own existential maps with those of others.

However, when a justifiably useful object experience becomes accessible, it needs to be acted on using specific instruments and techniques that constrain the range of results that can be obtained—and ultimately validate or frustrate the Artist's "vision." An Artist's professional perception, then, becomes concretely manifested in "technological formations," or semiotic processes that transform empirical observations of objects of experience into artifactual forms through practical interventions (see Kockelman 2013, 168–69, 181–82; Visakko, forthcoming). In such technological formations, one is always both a perceiver and the one perceived, as one's perception becomes perceivably captured in the resulting artifact, whether one is represented in the images, as was the case in the photographs above, or one's point of view is reflected by the images, as was sometimes the case in the videos. Such technological formations thus enable one to perceive a transformed version of one's own perception of the underlying object experience. Although all professional perception is "self-reflective" (see Styhre 2010, 450) in the sense that the perceiver actively refers to a set of underlying

principles, Artists' professional perception also involves a particular kind of reflection of the self, or a study of the self as signs. Such professional perception, then, has the capacity to transform one's everyday perception of the self as well (cf. McKenna 2014; Moschou and Anaya Rodriguez 2016).

It is particularly noteworthy that, in the initial stages, the role of Artist typically stays midgrounded (see Norris 2011, 47–50; cf. Goffman 1963, 43–63), while other activities take place. In fact, often the role of Artist must be sufficiently invisible so that it does not interfere with the activities and experiences that constitute the object of observation. Therefore, in such active but midgrounded modes, there may not be any public manifestations of the role at all: the expressions of the role are not addressed to others and may not be at all perceivable to them, and others are not expected to respond with complementing roles but rather keep on enacting their default roles. In other words, the role manifests itself mainly as an observational attitude. It may thus require the handling of extra “attentional tracks” (see Goffman 1974, 210). The Artist must attend to the “normal” mainline track (i.e., the publicly ongoing dominant interactions between intersubjectively engaged participants), while simultaneously scanning for other observations or perspectives that might be useful for artistic purposes—which they might ignore or disattend to in any other role. Moreover, such multitasking increases the intrasubjective “density” of the event (cf. Norris 2011, 110–11) for the Artists, as they have to manage several roles and involvements simultaneously, and it might even cause cognitive stress or interactional strain. Once something of interest is spotted, the role becomes temporarily foregrounded in the form of specific practical interventions, such as recording activities. Particularly in the kinds of elicited settings discussed above, the foregrounding transforms the social situation itself, as copresent others' cooperative attitudes are crucial for the success of the intervention.

Conclusion

This article has argued that socialization into the role of Artist rechannels the participants' relationship to their own environments and worlds of experience through role-specific modes of observation. These role-specific modes of observation were approached with the combination of three conceptual frameworks: professional perception, midgroundable roles, and the interplay of semiotic terrains and maps. The article suggests the combination provides an analytical grip on how photography- and videography-based techniques are used in community theater to study spatiotemporally situated manifestations of identity in public locales as well as in more private spheres. The specific dimensions of

professional perception that were identified in the study included chronotopic and characterological generalization (perceiving the situated self in relation to social typologies), phenomenological particularization (perceiving patterns of singular qualities), and emblematic incongruities (perceiving the self in contrast to surroundings and copresent others). The article also argued that professional perception in the role of Artist involves a distinctive midgrounded mode that individuals may use to explore their everyday terrains and experiences in order to identify suitable ingredients for collective artistic purposes.

Moreover, the article has emphasized the importance of the kinds of discursive processes through which professional perception becomes trained. The examined tasks relied relatively little on explicitly theorized principles, such as specific terminology (cf. Visakko, forthcoming), but, rather, were based on the practical modeling of the kinds of analytical and evaluative discursive stances that embody the epistemological principles of professional perception. In other words, the principles were learned from structured conversations and then projected on the participants' own experimentations with photography- and videography-based tasks. It was also seen that the same discursive processes simultaneously train the ability to justify rationally the artistic activities both to oneself and to others.

From another standpoint, the article has been a partial attempt to understand how community theater affects the young adults who participate in such activities. In a sense, the analyses above may be seen as a way of fleshing out how liminoidity emerges in social interaction. What is it about the examined activities that departs from everyday activities—particularly in the age of social media and handheld recording devices (cf. Daisuke and Ito 2003)? Importantly, the collective process, which aims at bringing a joint voice on a public stage, commits the group to a systematic and situated self-reflection and self-experimentation, including encounters with otherness (cf. Kramer 2005, 176–78; Diba and d'Oliveira 2015, 1357). A key aspect of the role of Artist is the kind of attitude toward oneself that allows for the constituents of one's identity to be used as instruments and ingredients in collective creative processes. One might argue that the role of Artist constitutes a new position within the identity of an individual and serves as an intermediary in a process that reorganizes signs of selfhood into public artifacts—entailing, as was seen, a sort of “aesthetics of identity.” Such a change of attitude may, to some degree, liberate one from habitual patterns or change the way in which one evaluates oneself in terms of others' anticipated attitudes—which may partly explain the positive effects the project has had on the participants' lives, according to their own accounts.

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