Becoming Artists: Collective Reflection of Personal Experience in Community Theater

Tomi Visakko, *University of Helsinki, Finland*

ABSTRACT

The article examines how the participants of a six-week community theater project in Helsinki (2015–16) become socialized into the role of Artist by the professional leaders of the project. One of the main goals of the project was to explore the "joint voice" of the ethnically and socioeconomically diverse group and to make that voice heard in society. Drawing on ethnographic data, the article focuses on a central writing technique that was used to scan the participants' past experiences and to rewrite them into ingredients of the joint voice. The article argues that the process of socialization involves a comprehensive epistemological transformation that gives rise to changes in the participants' perception of their experiences. The epistemological structure that regulates the writing activities pertains both to principles of entextualization (i.e., how personal experiences become transformed into textual patterns) and to rules of interpersonal engagement (i.e., how others' contributions are treated). Thus, it enables the construction of safe and effective channels along which private experiences can flow to the group's collective discursive space and onward to the public.

Many forms of "inclusive," "participatory," or "community" theater draw extensively on the personal experiences of the participants of the project. With specialized techniques and through complex semiotic chains, the participants' experiences become gradually processed into ingredients of artworks in joint creative processes. The beneficial effects of community theater often reported by participants, too, have been associated with the ways in which personal experiences are dealt with during such projects. Community theater

Contact Tomi Visakko at Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies, P.O. Box 4, University of Helsinki, Finland (tomi.visakko@helsinki.fi).

Signs and Society, vol. 8, no. 3 (Fall 2020). 2326-4489/2020/0803-0001$10.00

activities have been thought to enable the kinds of "genuine" and "profound" dialogues between participants that might not occur in other contexts (see, e.g., Diba and d'Oliveira 2015). In other words, the social and discursive dynamics of such collective processes may give rise to interpersonal contacts that differ from the participants' everyday habits and routines. One of the questions this article sets out to explore is how the conditions of such contacts are achieved in social interaction. Simultaneously, the analyses uncover a particular form of group creativity with specific rules and guidelines (see Sawyer 2003).

This article examines role socialization during a six-week theater project for young adults lead by professional artists in Helsinki in 2015–16. The participants were hired to the project as salaried Employees, and they both contributed to the scripting process and played the onstage roles in the final piece. The socialization process, then, involves a variety of mutually complementing roles. The role of Performer, for instance, revolves around stage presence and the techniques of acting used to portray onstage Characters. The focus of this article, however, is on a set of more basic and, in some sense, more intangible, underlying capacities that Artists need in order to contribute to joint creative processes by using themselves both as a source of materials and as an instrument of art making.[1] The article concentrates on a single writing technique that was essential to the group's creative process, as it was used to source materials from the participants' own worlds of experience. The main argument the article makes is that the process of socialization involves a comprehensive epistemological transformation that gives rise to changes in how the participants relate to their own and to others' experiences. The analysis of writing-based reflection of personal experience in the early days of the theater project offers a concrete view of the onset of the transformation.

The epistemological structure of the writing technique examined here reflects in multiple ways the broader professional and social context of the project. First, the participants form ethnically and socioeconomically diverse groups of individuals. On the one hand, the diversity reflects the composition of the segment of the public to which the project was offered. On the other hand, it reflects the ideals of the project itself. The project specifically aimed at genuine interpersonal

1. The capitalization of the role designations indicates that they refer to the local roles manifested in the data of this study. Simultaneously, however, the generic naming of the roles (as "Artist," "Performer," "Character," and "Employee") is meant to imply that these local roles are related to similar roles elsewhere and have inherited features of more general role types regimented by societal and art world institutions (see also Becker 1982, 40–67, 165–91). The criteria for distinguishing the roles from one another consist in the fundamental commitments and entitlements related to the roles as well as the social structures and cultural traditions that regiment them. The approach, then, differs from, for example, Kramer's (2002) analysis, which focuses on the emergent communicative roles in community theater talk.

encounters across categories of identity. In fact, the groups often consisted of people whose paths ordinarily might not have ever crossed in society. One of the goals of the project was to explore the group's "joint voice" (yhteinen ääni) and to make that voice heard in society. The writing technique was meant to source identity-central materials from a variety of individuals with the aim of reworking them into components of the joint voice. Moreover, the topics included racism, homelessness, unemployment, mental health issues, the unfair treatment of young people, and other sensitive themes that gave rise to certain ethical responsibilities for the leaders. As will be seen, specific rules of social interaction and self-regulation were needed. The analyzed activities, then, also reflect a specific ideology of "phaticity" or channel building (see Lemon 2017). That is, they embody a particular understanding of how safe and effective links between individuals in the group may be achieved so that personal experiences can flow from the private realm to the group's collective discursive space and onward to the public.

As the participants were salaried employees in a publicly funded project, it was their duty to contribute to the joint creative process by sharing their personal experiences. As a context for learning artistic skills, then, a community theater setting differs markedly from, for instance, commercial arts courses that individuals, such as members of the privileged "creative class," may opt for in order to expand their repertoire of expressive skills as part of an individualist project of the self (cf., e.g., Wilf 2013). At the heart of the community theater project lies *collective* agency—and the rules of the writing technique, too, aim at that end. There is little room for the mystification of creativity of individual artists (cf. Wilf 2014, 403–7). The ultimate goal is neither the expression of the "authentic" self nor creative self-shaping (cf. Wilf 2011; 2014, 398–401) but transforming personal experiences into constituents of a joint communicative and aesthetic construct that explores the individuals' relation to the group and the group's relation to society—a coproduced social stance. The discursive formulation of the experiences, thus, becomes particularly important. They need to capture private experiences in sufficiently concrete terms so that they are relatable to others and reworkable in subsequent phases into scenes, lines, and props. Therefore, for the functioning of the channel, the formulation of the texts is a central concern and discussed extensively during the feedback conversations.

We see, then, that the epistemological structure that regulates the Artists' activities pertains both to principles of entextualization (i.e., how personal experiences are transformed into textual patterns) and to rules of interpersonal

engagement (i.e., how others' contributions are treated). In other words, the regulation of language use is targeted not just at writing but also at social interaction around the writings (cf., e.g., Solin and Hynninen 2018). The analyses examine the semiotic details of the collective reflection of personal experience and the underlying rules and guidelines. The first analytical subsection explores the general rules that guide the Artists' writing during the project. The second one looks at the regimentation of particular contributions during the feedback discussions. First, the following sections discuss the central concepts of the article and the background of the theater project.

Art as Social Interaction

Although the theater project examined in this article differs decidedly from many other kinds of "artistic" contexts, much of what has been said about art as a form of cultural behavior applies to the project. The specific criteria for the array of human activities metaculturally classified as "art" have been, and continue to be, subject to radical sociohistorical changes (see, e.g., Becker 1982; Shiner 2001). The common ground for different forms of "art," then, has to be looked for in the underlying semiotic principles and cultural assumptions rather than the surface forms of such activities. Dewey ([1934] 2005), for instance, regards different forms of art as tools of reflection and experimentation that are used to study human experience and its social conditions and consequences. In particular, art has the capacity of illuminating the value hierarchies and contrasts underlying everyday experience. In a similar vein, Bateson (1972, 128–50) sees art making as the skill of exploring the "systemic" nature of selfhood—that is, the dependence of conscious individual experience on environments, social relations, and relatively unconscious biological or psychological processes. In his view, art seeks to illuminate the potential of the ecological and sociocultural systems that give rise to human experience and to integrate different levels of experience, such as the rational and the emotional or the public and the private. We see, then, that conveying meanings that differ from those in everyday contexts has been regarded as a distinctive characteristic of art—and it characterizes the activities examined in this article, too.

From the standpoint of Goffman (1974), art involves transitions in the cultural frames of interpretation that organize social interaction and human experience. For instance, specific transformations in such frames are needed to conjure up the kinds of social relations and forms of personhood that are typically associated with theater—but not usually everyday life—such as "fictive" characters on the stage and onlooking spectators in the audience. On the one hand,

artistic processes are brought about by transformations of interactional frames, and, on the other hand, artistic processes often involve the reframing of past experiences and everyday events into ingredients of artworks. For Turner (1982), Western modern art is characterized by what he calls "liminoidity," a specific set of changes in the rules, orientations, and criteria of evaluation of social interaction. Liminoid activities aim at liberating the participants to some degree from prevailing social and psychological orders and, thus, allow for a creative and playful reflection and manipulation of those orders (cf. also Mead 1934, 209–11). Similarly, the writing technique examined here is framed by an explicit set of rules that invites the participants to process personal experiences in ways that might not be possible in other contexts.

Finally, in the spirit of Foucault (e.g., 1975; 2001, 1623–32) and Becker (1982), art can be viewed as a semiotic technology, a network of interrelated practices and mutually complementing roles, that both generates artworks for audiences and trains new generations of artists (and audiences). Semiotic technologies, then, are set up both to produce new artifacts or performances and to instill new roles and capacities in persons (see also Wilf 2014). Summing up, we may view art as a pattern of social interaction that transforms both experiences into artworks and individuals into artists of various kinds. "Art" is fabricated out of the "everyday" but simultaneously contrastively othered in relation to it by the same transformative processes drawing on professional epistemologies.

Following Kockelman (2013, 125; see also 96, 110, 125–29), the term "role" here refers to a semiotic process "whose object is a 'status,' whose sign is an expression of that status, and whose canonical interpretant is another role that complements it, or an identity that incorporates it." In other words, the sign-components of the process, or role-expressions, are the perceivable manifestations of the role. The interpretant-components of the process—that is, the effects or responses the role-expressions give rise to—may be called "attitudes." The interplay of role-expressions and attitudes projects statuses on participants in social interaction. Statuses, then, are projected tendencies or expectations in light of which the incumbents' actions become interpreted and evaluated. For instance, in order to be granted the status of Artist, one needs to secure others' recognizing and cooperative attitudes by mastering a set of role-expressions, such as the skills associated with the role. Importantly, in conventionalized role relations, roles and attitudes correlate so that one's attitude toward others' roles is often one's own corresponding role. For instance, the role of Artist is complemented by the roles of Mentor and Director, enacted by the leaders of the project. Moreover, as will be claimed in this article, a central expression of the

role of Artist is how one relates, as Artist, to one's own other roles. That is, the incorporation of the Artist's activities within the individual's identity is a key concern in the article.

The term "epistemology" refers to the assumptions that organize the ways in which a particular semiotic community interprets and represents their worlds of experience through relatively propositional modes of semiosis—that is, involving, at least at some degree of remove, the denotational and inferential capacity afforded by language (see Kockelman 2006; 2010, 80–84; 2013, 168–69; also Bateson 1972, 313, 315). Epistemology, in other words, manifests itself as the relatively systematic ways in which humans (could) rationalize or account for their perceptions and intentions.[2] Many institutional roles and professional traditions depend on specialized epistemologies. A central expression of the role of Artist is grounding one's actions in professional epistemologies and the observational capacities they enable. For instance, observing the rehearsal of a theatrical scene, a professional would be able to analyze what they see and to justify what should be done in distinctive and more accurate terms than laypersons. Questions of epistemology, then, are closely linked to questions of professional perception and professional verbalization of experience (see Goodwin 1994, 2000).

Summer Job as an Artist

The data examined in this article come from a theater project organized by the Kiasma Theatre in Helsinki in 2011–16. Each year, in the summer, with financial and organizational support from the city of Helsinki, the project employed 8–10 young adults, whose ages ranged between 18 and 25 (majority was required). The underlying goals of the project included familiarizing the participants with the art world, introducing them to different kinds of education and employment options within the art world, and preventing youth marginalization—although the different parties involved entertained slightly diverging expectations of the project (see also Visakko 2020). The data were collected in the summers of

2. Epistemology in this sense is closely related to notions such as "semiotic ontology" (see Kockelman 2013), "semiotic ideology" (see Silverstein 2003; Keane 2018), or "reflexive (or metasemiotic) models" (see Agha 2007a). The difficulty of distinguishing ontology from epistemology in empirical contexts has often been noted. As Bateson (1972, 314) puts it: "[The living human being's] (commonly unconscious) beliefs about what sort of world it is will determine how he sees it and acts within it, and his ways of perceiving and acting will determine his beliefs about its nature. The living man is thus bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which [. . .] become partially self-validating for him." In a sense, epistemology might be viewed as a particular subset of ontological assumptions (or premises) that concerns the production of knowledge. That is, epistemology organizes the ways in which humans propositionally formulate and communicate beliefs (epistemic commitments), perceptions (empirical commitments), and intentions (practical commitments) (see Brandom 2000; Kockelman 2006).

2015 and 2016, and they include field notes from the entire period, video recordings from selected days (about 150 hours), feedback questionnaires, and initial and final interviews, as well as all the writings and other materials produced by the participants during the project.

The participants, referred to the project by a counselor of the city of Helsinki, usually constituted an ethnically heterogeneous group: some had Finnish roots, others an immigrant background (e.g., of Somali or Middle Eastern descent). Not all spoke Finnish as their first language, but a sufficient proficiency was required, since Finnish was the working language of the project. Even many of the immigrant-background participants had gone through the Finnish school system or otherwise had experience of institutionalized language instruction in Finland. From the standpoint of the writing tasks, variation in the participants' prior proficiency and how it is dealt with is significant for the group dynamics. The participants' writing proficiency and their previous experiences along their educational trajectories also tend to correlate, for instance, with their perceptions of themselves as writers (in terms of, say, self-confidence or stigmas).

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 a professional theater maker, referred to as "Maria" in this article, who worked with one or two partners from other fields of art, such as visual arts and dramaturgy. The participants contributed to the scripting and the staging of the final piece with their writings, group discussions, video recordings, and other tasks. The piece was then composed and directed by the leaders on the basis of the materials produced by the participants. Finally, the participants played the onstage roles themselves. The pieces were typically about thirty-minute-long collages of scenes centered around a specific theme, often delivered in monologue style by alternating performers.

The activities of the project drew on multiple methods and sources of inspiration and cannot be reduced to any single canonical method. One might say that the project operated with *composite* epistemologies. In part, the project relied on the so-called devising method (see, e.g., Oddey 1994) in which the script of the artwork originates as a collaborative effort within some (often nonprofessional) group or community on the basis of their experiences and interests. The leader of the project, Maria, who had worked as an actor, director, and scriptwriter, had a background in Chekhovian methods (see, e.g., Petit 2010), but she also made use of other techniques and various more or less generic methods commonly used in the field. Her changing working partners, each trained in different fields of art, brought in their own methods and epistemological

frames. Mikko (2015, 2016), a visual artist, focused particularly on the principles and techniques of videography during the project. Aki (2016), a dramaturgist and scriptwriter, in turn, introduced the participants to specific writing methods and theories of composition. While writing tasks had an important role in the creative process both in 2015 and in 2016, Aki's involvement in 2016 emphasized writing as a technical activity and steered it toward a slightly more theoretical direction.[3]

Artist Talk

The early weeks of the project involved an advanced introduction to art world practices. As one of the goals of the project was to give the participants an overview of arts as a form of work, the participants were immersed in different fields of art and a variety of styles, genres, and techniques. The types of artworks that were examined and analyzed by the groups during the summers of 2015 and 2016 included films and documentaries, contemporary and classical paintings, art photography, theater plays, video and performance art, environmental art, and numerous examples of literary works, such as modern prose and drama, urban legends, and folk myths. The examples also included some of the leaders' own past work.

From the standpoint of the group's own incipient creative process, the detailed discussions of artworks served, first, to introduce the participants to professional ways of analyzing and evaluating works of art—that is, to a kind of "artist talk." Second, the discussed artworks were often so selected that they simultaneously served as a source of activating and exemplifying "input" (syöte) for the group's own creative process and the specific tasks they were given. The participants also had the opportunity of trying out many techniques themselves, photography and videography in particular, and both in 2015 and in 2016 videos made by the participants were used as ingredients of the final pieces (see Visakko 2020).

Another salient form of "artist talk" is the use of professional jargon. As the projects of 2015 and 2016 progressed, certain lexical items, such as *plari* (script) or *parenteesi* (parenthetical), gradually found their way from the leaders' repertoires to the participants' repertoires as occasional alternatives to more common expressions. The former word is an in-group designation for a copy

3. For the sake of systematicity, pseudonyms are used throughout the article for both the leaders and the participants. However, by their own request, the real names of the professional artists are mentioned here: "Maria" is theater maker Elina Izarra Ollikainen, "Mikko" is visual artist Sauli Sirviö, and "Aki" is dramaturgist Are Nikkinen.

of the script, used by actors, directors, and other people in the field, and the latter a technical designation for a particular formal convention used in scripts.[4] Let us take the former as an example. As evidenced by the first occurrences of *plari*, the expression was previously unknown to all participants and, therefore, became saliently associated with the new role relations and professional ways of speaking. In 2015, Maria first used the term out of habit and without explaining its meaning. One of the participants then had to ask what a *plari* was. A few days later, Maria, now herself clearly aware of her own use of the term, selected a strategy of ostensive socialization. While talking about the script after the rehearsal of a scene, she fetched a nearby copy of the script and referred to it as "this *plari*" (tää plari), emphasizing the term while visibly holding the script at the participants (July 30, 2015). Such events, then, momentarily foreground distinct patterns of language use related to the role of Artist.

One might claim, however, that the adoption of single, easily segmentable lexical forms that merely substitute for more common forms and denote relatively concrete types of objects is a somewhat simple step in the process of socialization, although such expressions certainly do provide the participants with an effective way of overtly signaling their growing commitment to the new professional role. This article argues that a more comprehensive—but perhaps more inconspicuous—transformation lies in the discursive processing of personal experience during the project. The next section takes a detailed look at the epistemological structure of the writing technique and the ways in which it guides the treatment of the participants' personal experiences.

Rewriting Experiences

One of the main methods of extracting memories, ideas, opinions, self-conceptions, biographical facts, and products of imagination from the participants during the scripting phase of the project involved writing tasks with varying topics and formats. This section aims to show how such relatively unassuming and routine-like tasks, in fact, embody some of the essential principles of art making in the project, as they allow for the controlled transformation of personal experience into entextualized, reworkable ingredients for the group's creative process. That is, the technique examined here serves as an instrument for scanning the participants' worlds of experience for useful objects. Unlike in, say, photography

4. In scripts and screenplays, parentheses or parentheticals are descriptions of a character's action (e.g., "takes a step backward," "puts his hat on") or style of expression (e.g., "sleepily," "sarcastically") that accompany the actual lines of speech as instructions for delivery (and are prototypically enclosed in parentheses, whence the name).

tasks (see Visakko 2020), the focus of attention is not on ongoing, intersubjectively perceivable events but, rather, the scanning consists in a relatively decontextualized and introspective reflection on past experiences.

Roughly speaking, the writing tasks can be divided into five phases. Sometimes the phases follow one another compactly, but sometimes they may be distributed over a few of days. Before the actual writing (phase 3), for which about thirty minutes is usually allotted, the participants are provided with a specific theme or topic as well as task-specific instructions on how to write about it, such as a particular format or sometimes theoretical guidance concerning the ideation, structure, or style of the composition (phase 2). Usually even before the task-specific instructions the participants have received input in the form of particular examples or through group discussions dealing with the kind of writing in question or with the treatment of the theme in art (phase 1).[5] After the writing phase, the compositions are read out loud and discussed among the group (phase 4). Sometimes the same texts are reworked; sometimes the fruits of the feedback conversation are carried over to the following task (phase 5). That is, the improvisational nature of the final writings varies.

Phase 1. Input (e.g., examples, models, group discussions)
Phase 2. Task-specific instructions and theoretical principles
Phase 3. Individual writing
Phase 4. Structured feedback conversation in group
Phase 5. Rewriting or next task

The topics of the writing tasks were usually semantically linked to or otherwise motivated by the central theme of the project. For instance, in the summer of 2016 the project was conceptually centered around the theme "gold."[6] The very first writing task the participants were given on their first day (June 29, 2016) was titled "It is gold. . ." (Kultaa on. . .) and it involved listing descriptions of valued experiences. The following week, on their fourth workday, the task was paired with its intertextual counterpart "It is not gold. . ." (Kultaa ei ole. . .) (July 4, 2016), a task that aimed at eliciting descriptions of the least valued aspects of the participants' worlds of experience. The last analytical section will return to the

5. That is, the ground for the task is usually prepared both iconically and indexically by giving the participants a grasp of the concrete qualities and patterns involved and (symbolically) by making explicit a set of general principles that should be applied to the individual compositions.

6. The original working title for the performance was *Kultainen?* (Golden?), and the final title turned out to be *Kultaa!* (Gold!), both formulations steeped in different kinds of intertextual potential.

details of this format. The following two sections first illuminate the general characteristics of the technique that apply to each task regardless of its specific format. The next section describes the general rules of engaging with one's own personal experiences and with others' contributions. The following one then looks at the feedback conversation of the "It is not gold" task in order to exemplify the principles of entextualization discussed in such conversations.

Rules of Engagement

This section discusses the general rules that regiment the relations between personal experience and written texts and their treatment in subsequent social interaction. In the beginning of the project, the participants are instructed extensively on how to approach such writing tasks in general (as part of phase 2 of the first tasks). The participants are told in some detail that the ensuing tasks constitute a professional technique essential to the group's joint creative process—and, thus, differ from the kinds of writing they are used to in other contexts. Usually, the principles of the technique are presented to the participants gradually: they are spread out within the flow of activities and rendered explicit only to the degree necessary in each event (for detailed analyses of the unfolding of instructional processes, see Harjunpää et al., forthcoming). What follows is an analytical summary of the main points:

1. To begin with, the participants are encouraged to forget everything they have previously learned about writing—especially all "rules," referring to the norms of standard language.[7] The technique becomes strictly contrasted with writing in everyday contexts and in other institutional contexts, school in particular. It is made clear that the aim of the tasks is to extract useful reworkable materials for further phases of the creative process. It is essential to let ideas flow freely. Therefore, the technique requires the suppression of overly evaluative attitudes toward language use. Similarly, Maria encourages the participants always to "write like the characters would talk" (July 6, 2016), even if it meant writing profanities or the like—adding that it is the job of the Scriptwriter to "censor" later if necessary. The implication, then, is that fidelity to the original experiences is preferred over stylistic or moral monitoring of the writings. The rule explicitly contrasts the writing tasks with the centers of normativity that

7. It is noteworthy that the rules of the technique itself are not referred to as "rules." The normative nature of these principles is conveyed, for instance, by negations, modal elements, directives, and sanctioning responses to breaches of the principles.

shape many "everyday" contexts of language use (see also, e.g., Solin and Hynninen 2018, 507).

2. As for the content of the writings, the ideal starting point is one's personal experiences, but one is allowed to color, exaggerate, and reimagine. That is, a creative modification of the source experiences according to the requirements of the writing task is acceptable. In fact, one is obliged to modify those aspects that one is not willing or able to share with the group (see also rule 6). On one occasion, Maria explained the importance of grounding one's texts in personal experiences by comparing them to a "trampoline" from which the text bounces up making the language "livelier" (elävämpää) (July 6, 2015). According to the underlying ideology of authenticity, then, signs are more effective when they bear the force of some dynamic, personally experienced object. However, on the same occasion, she also advised the participants not to get "stuck in the facts" but to let the emerging text itself lead the process. The technical qualities and the usability of the end product are the ultimate goals, not the correspondence of the text with real-life events.
3. Crucially, one should never be held accountable or hold others accountable for distinctions between what is "real" and what is not. Such clarifications of factual veracity are strictly voluntary. In other words, the aim should not be to pry into others' lives but to come up with texts that are useful as textual structures and can be reworked into components of the final piece in subsequent phases. Some of the slogans Maria used to illustrate this rule included "text as text" (teksti tekstinä) (e.g., July 30, 2016) and "no digging up of social porn" (ei kaivella sosiaalipornoa) (e.g., July 7, 2015). The participants, then, are only responsible for the technical aspects of the discursive artifacts they produce, whereas the truth value of the propositional contents of those artifacts is relegated to nonessential status within the metasemiotic frame of this technique. The technique, therefore, involves a distinct departure from the norms of everyday conversation. That is, a role-specific epistemological structure takes over the regimentation of discursive commitment and accountability.
4. Once finished, the texts are read out loud during the feedback conversation—usually by the writers themselves—and subsequently commented on by both the leaders and the other participants. As will be seen shortly, the focus remains on the technical aspects of the compositions and on the perspectives from which they approach the topic. However, within the confines of rule 3, the writing may also be treated as a reflection of the writer's

personal experience. If the writing, for instance, deals with difficult or painful issues—and sometimes the reading sessions turn quite emotional—others should respond with empathy and respect. Moreover, if they wish to, the writers can clarify their intentions or the background of the composition. In a sense, the reading out loud functions as an authentication that, for this once, links the text with the voice of the one who wrote it and from whose experiences it springs. Until the event of reading, the text belongs to the participant—that is, the animator (the one who utters the words), the author (the one who composed the words), and the principal (the one who is committed to the words) of the text coincide and converge on the same individual (see Goffman 1981; Kockelman 2004)—but, from then on, the text becomes a recomposable ingredient in the group's collective creative process.

5. As a rule of thumb, although with some case-specific exceptions, the person who originally wrote the text will not perform it on stage if some version of the text ends up incorporated into the script of the final performance. That is, the original author is ideally blocked from being the animator of its recomposed forms in subsequent events. Knowledge of such distancing might make it easier for the participants to relate to their textual output in a more technical manner during the writing tasks. The rule may also be seen as reflecting the ideal of the joint voice: with the recombination of animators, the final performance truly becomes a collectively performed voice and more than the sum of individual voices. Moreover, if the text was inspired by difficult personal experiences, the principle of distancing makes the task of onstage performance easier, since the participants have neither the training nor the experience of professional actors in terms of insulating the character they are playing from their everyday selves and emotions.
6. Should a participant happen to write something they later consider too personal, they are not forced to read the text out loud and the text can even be withheld from the scripting process. Ideally, though, this should not happen often, as the accumulation of materials is crucial for the scripting. Thus, the participants should constantly remain reflexively aware of what they are willing and able to share and contribute to the group. Quoting Maria, as Artists they should learn to be "personal without being intimate" (henkilökohtainen olematta intiimi) (e.g., July 12, 2016). This essential distinction comes up in different forms throughout the project, and the terms start taking on a technicalized sense within the epistemological structure of the technique. Ideally, the participants should control their

> own boundaries and understand the consequences of their discursive activities. An Artist, in other words, is someone who knows how to use their personal experiences as ingredients of public artworks without making themselves mentally or socially vulnerable by bearing something too intimate.

The social effects of the rules could be summed up as follows. The rules safeguard the writing subjects' autonomy while they contribute to a collective process. Invasive questions from others can be rejected and too intimate entextualizations can be recalled by appealing to the rules. Importantly, the rules place the participants on a more equal footing in terms of their nativeness as well as previous writing skills and experiences. Some of the participants were highly fluent and experienced writers, having a good command of the norms of the standard language and textual composition. Their preexisting skills were, in other words, of a prestigious kind, valued widely in society. In contrast, some participants, more often males, were far less proficient but had an acute interest in specific forms of writing, such as rap and hip hop lyrics. The rules encourage an atmosphere in which all kinds of skills and resources are equally valuable if they contribute to the creative process. Similarly, the leaders never drew attention to any of the nonstandard or nonnative aspects in the writings. The rules, thus, shift the focus from individual proficiency to the technical aspects of the joint creative process.

Finally, we may note that the production of "fictivity" already begins here. Discursive materials become extracted from particular identities but are simultaneously disassociated from those identities. The technique mediates the relationship between (1) the object of entextualization (i.e., personal experience), (2) the resulting sign configuration (i.e., a textual form), and (3) the range of interpretations (i.e., the social-interactional consequences of the text) in an institutionally regimented manner.[8] The participants are mutually committed to a specific mode of representation in which the contents produced by others should be recognized with empathy and respect but excluded from the realm

8. As was seen previously, the importance of grounding one's texts in personal experience is emphasized even though the specific nature of that grounding is treated as a private matter. In this semiotic ideology (see Keane 2018), the dynamic object of the text (i.e., the preexisting personal experience that motivates and gives rise to the linguistic signs) is considered important for the "liveliness" of the aesthetic effect; however, the immediate object (i.e., the experience as it becomes mediated by a particular entextualized sign configuration) is treated as a relatively independent artifact, not as a representation of the experience it is grounded in (for the terms, see Lee 1997b, 127; Atkin 2010; Kockelman 2013, 23–24). In terms of social-interactional relations and accountability, the dynamic object and the immediate object become insulated from each other into different semiotic worlds. The signs are supposed to bear the force of the object but not really make that particular object knowable to others. There is, then, a process of experiential generalization involved (see also Visakko 2020).

of social accountability. That is, the correspondence of the contents with actual persons or past events cannot be taken on as a topic and does not stand in need of reasons or evidence. Similarly, any evaluative commentary should be directed at the sign configuration and its subsequent interpretability as a component of an artwork, not its object. This incipient fictivity, then, relies on a particular kind of recognizing but relatively nonregimenting attitude of Artists toward the referentiality of the textual forms produced by other Artists during the creative process.

Toward Effective Imagistic Formulations

Next, let us look at how the "It is not gold" texts, produced in accordance with the foregoing rules, are treated in the feedback conversations (phase 4, fig. 1). The general rules of the technique were primarily concerned with the retrospective relationship between texts and their real-life source experiences, but in the feedback interactions the focus of regimentation shifts toward a prospective framing. The main concern becomes the relationship between the entextualized form and its interpretability and recontextualizability as a component of an artwork. That is, the textual forms become evaluated from the standpoint of their practical usability in the subsequent phases of the creative process. Or, framed differently, the focus shifts from the relationship between the Artist and the identity of the individual inhabiting that role toward the relationship between the Artist and complementing art world roles, such as Scriptwriters, Directors, Performers, and Spectators. A central concern in the feedback conversations is the effectiveness of the iconic contents mediated by the textual formulations. In

Figure 1. Feedback conversation underway

order to be useful, they should mediate the kind of imagery that can be used by Directors and Performers to conjure up the kinds of scenes and characters that are accessible to the Spectators. Because the following segments are situated early on in the socialization process, they include explicit clarifications of the underlying principles in abundance.

One of the leaders' recurring feedback patterns is to describe their own experiences as interpreters and to selectively point out examples that they found effective and ones that were problematic in some regard. For instance, after the first participant has read his text, Maria notes that, initially, she "got worried" because the first line was "really general," but then the text fortunately turned toward a more "concrete" direction. We may note that from the very beginning the feedback conversation starts pivoting around the notion of "concreteness" of the entextualized formulations. As will be seen in this section, "concrete" (konkreettinen) is a core term in the metasemiotic terminology that the leaders, and consequently some participants too, use to evaluate the contributions. The aim of the analyses here is to show how such terms become technicalized through their repeated use during feedback conversations. Through their cumulative embedding in analytical observations, they become linked to specific semiotic parameters. Such interactions, then, transmit professional epistemological structures from the leaders to the participants. The principles discussed in the feedback conversations reflect the diverse backgrounds of the leaders and sometimes bear similarities with classic guidelines of creative writing—such as "show, don't tell" (näytä älä kerro), which, in fact, comes up once. The analyses here, in any case, aim to show how exactly such principles become operationalized in actual usage and how their interpretation reflects the social context.

A similar concern for "concreteness" occurs with the next participant, Ismail, whose contribution the leaders analyze in slightly more detail. In particular, the contrast between the first and fourth lines of the text becomes highlighted as an illustration:[9]

1	Kulta ei ole kun muut ihmiset käytää minua hyväksi.	It is not gold when other people take advantage of me.

9. To give examples of the participants' writings, the written lines are presented here, although what the leaders actually react to during the feedback conversation are, usually, the read-out-loud versions, not the written ones. The writings, however, anchor the participants' contribution to the event, and they are sometimes consulted if problems of comprehension, recollection, or pronunciation occur. Later, the writings are thoroughly reexamined by the leaders in search of scriptable segments. The Finnish-language originals sometimes contain signs of the quick, improvisational writing process or the nonnativeness of the writer (e.g., ungrammatical constructions, errors of spelling). Such features are ignored in the translations unless they are particularly important for the analyses.

	. . .	. . .
4	Kulta ei todellakaan on jos minulla menee hyvin, on ruoka ja töitä, mutta naapurini kuole nälkään ja kylmyyteen.	It is certainly not gold if I'm doing well, have food and work, but my neighbor dies from hunger and cold.

Maria, noting the similarity with the first participant's text, draws attention to line 1 as an example of a formulation that is not concrete and to line 4 as one that is sufficiently concrete. As she clarifies in the excerpt below, the problem with line 1 is that it does not specify in more detail how the denoted process ("being taken advantage of") manifests itself:[10]

totanoinni ↑sulla oli sama (.)	well now ↑you had the same (.)
et se meni kohti konkretiaa (1.0)	that it went toward concreteness (0.5)
huomasiksä ite sen eron [. . .]	did you notice yourself the difference [. . .]
et siin on ↑heti tavallaan se että	that there is ↑immediately kind of the fact
että ((up-down gesture with hands))	that ((up-down gesture with hands))
kultaa ei ole se jos mulla menee	it is not gold if I'm doing
paremmin ku mun naapurilla. se on	better than my neighbor. that's
konkreettinen. mutta kultaa ei ole tulla	concrete. but it is not gold to be
hyväksikäytetyksi jos joku	taken advantage of if somebody
hyväksikäyttää mua niin siinä	takes advantage of me then there
herää heti kysymys	arises immediately the question
kun ollaan draaman äärellä?	when we're dealing with drama?
että miten. (1.5) et sit sen haluis	like how. (1.5) like you'd like to
kuulla sen niinku et hy-	hear it like ta-
hyväksikäyttäminen on niin	taking advantage is so
älyttömän (e)t se on niin laaja	immensely (like) it's so vast

The formulation is regarded as too abstract because the range of phenomena that could be classified as "being taken advantage of" is simply too extensive ("vast") to be useful. Maria justifies her stance by referring to the special requirements of drama making ("when we're dealing with drama"). Her point, which becomes increasingly clear to the participants as the project progresses, then, is that Artists should pay particular attention to how objects of experience manifest themselves in terms of indices that can ultimately be scripted and staged (as lines, gestures, actions, props, etc.).

Often the leaders suggest concrete ways of reworking the text. Aki continues by exemplifying how the abstract notion of "taking advantage" could be reformulated on the basis of its concrete manifestations:

10. The following symbols are used in the transcripts: An arrow (↑) indicates a rise in pitch. Underlining is used for emphasized syllables (e.g., *draaman*). Pauses are marked in parentheses in seconds, e.g., (0.5), mere (.) indicating a micropause. A question mark (?) indicates a markedly rising intonation, a full stop (.) a clearly falling intonation (whereas slightly falling/rising or level intonations are not transcribed). The beginning of overlapping speech is marked with a square bracket ([). Inaudible parts are placed in parentheses (–), and [. . .] is used to mark an omitted segment (see, e.g., Jefferson 1983).

hyväksikäyttö voi olla niinku [. . .]	taking advantage can be like [. . .]
se voi olla että kultaa ei ole et mun pomo	it can be like it is not gold that my boss
ei maksa mulle ylityökorvausta (–) se	doesn't pay me for overtime (–) that
on esimerkiksi konkreettinen esimerkki	is for example a concrete example of
hyväksikäytöstä tai se voi olla	being taken advantage of or it can be
ihan mitä vaa [. . .] seuraavaksi (–)	anything [. . .] next (–)
rupeette miettii miten se näkyy ja	start thinking about **how it shows** and
mikä se niinku konkreettinen tapahtuma	what like the concrete event
on ja näin (1.0) ja (.) missä se	is and like this (1.0) and (.) **where it**
näkyy	**shows**

He instructs the group to start paying more attention to (1) how the denoted object appears to perception ("how it shows"); and (2) what the specific settings or circumstances around the object are ("what the concrete event is"; "where it shows"). The original formulation "when other people take advantage of me" is a generalized and nonspecific moral evaluation of others' actions, but Aki's spontaneous reformulation specifies it with an antagonist ("my boss") and a cause for the moral grievance ("doesn't pay for overtime") while also implying an environment and its habitual activities and social structures (i.e., workplace routines and asymmetrical power relations). The kinds of formulations that become treated as problematic usually do not link the profiled imagery to recognizable environments or social relations but, instead, operate at relatively high levels of inferential hierarchies, using hyperonyms instead of hyponyms or referring to broad classes instead of particular instances ("other people" versus "my boss"; "taking advantage of" versus "not paying for overtime"). We may note, then, that through such indexical linking of (intensional) definitions and (extensional) examples and counterexamples, the ideal of "concreteness" starts pointing to specific semiotic parameters. Gradually, as writing tasks and feedback conversations accumulate during the project, the parameters become more varied and nuanced.[11]

Feelings as an Additional Challenge

In the following excerpt, the group has moved on to reflect on the description of "insecurity" (turvattomuus). From the standpoint of the ideal of concreteness,

11. Part of what the leaders aim at is a *chronotopic elaboration* of the participants' descriptions—that is, making sure that a sufficient degree of recognizable indices of time, place, and personhood is incorporated into the writings (see Agha [2007b] on chronotopic formulations). On another occasion, the group was assigned a complementing writing task that involved selecting a target outside (a public space, scene, or other setting) and describing as many of its perceivable qualities in as much detail as possible. The task was instructed orally and with an exemplary list written down on a flip chart telling the participant to "describe what they 'see'" (kuvaile se mitä näet), such as the "terrain" (maastoa), "colors" (värejä), "details" (yksityiskohtia), "smells'" (hajuja), "sounds"/"voices" (ääniä), "surfaces" (pintoja), "buildings" (rakennuksia), "people" (ihmisiä), "light" (valoa), and "weather" (säätä). We see that the list, in fact, involves perception beyond mere vision. Moreover, it involves different levels of visual perception: mere phenomenological qualities (e.g., colors, light) and qualities coupled with parts (e.g., surfaces, details) of chronotopically classifiable entities (e.g., buildings, people).

it presents an additional challenge that pertains to the specific nature of feelings as objects of experience. Whereas, for example, the process of "taking advantage of someone" necessarily manifests itself in some form of interpersonal action, feelings do not inherently have public manifestations and can remain relatively indirectly perceivable or inferable for others.[12] The challenge with describing feelings is that they tend to be relatively private. The question then becomes how to entextualize such experiences effectively so that they become linked to perceivable, situated indices and thus accessible to others.

The leaders first propose measures somewhat similar to the ones in the previous example—that is, describing the surroundings ("what is the situation"). Next, however, Aki switches from his previous metasemiotic guideline, "where it shows" (i.e., the locus of manifestation), to "how it arises" (i.e., the manner of emergence). One of the participants, Miina, then suggests a reformulation ("constantly having to look over one's shoulder"), which is instantly ratified by the leaders, and the writer, too, nods suggesting that he has understood the point:

Maria:	[. . .] ni sit tavallaan se et mikä se on se tilanne missä sulla ei ole turvallinen olo niinku tavallaan	[. . .] so then like what it is the situation where you don't have a secure feeling like you know
Aki:	miten se syntyy	how does it arise
Maria:	miten se syntyy se turvattomuuden tunne? [. . .]	how does it arise that feeling of insecurity? [. . .]
Miina:	[. . .] kultaa ei ole aina joutua kävelemään ja katsomaan olan taakse (jotenki niinku tollee vai)	[. . .] it is not gold if [you] always have to walk and look over [your] shoulder (somehow like that or)
Maria:	nii [just	yes [exactly
Aki:	[just noin	[exactly like that

The new metasemiotic guideline, "how it arises," draws attention to sign events that are *antecedent* in relation to the focal object of experience. It suggests the concretization of relatively private phenomena by describing the publicly perceivable events that led up to them (i.e., the causes of the object's existence). However, Miina's suggestion ("look over your shoulder") already transcends the guideline, as it focuses on the *consequent* events caused by

12. Phrased more carefully, feelings become manifested in a variety of semiotic modes (e.g., as mere physiological reactions; as spontaneous facial expressions, gestures, or interjections; as more controlled interactional expressions or repressions, such as crying and consoling, linguistic descriptions and responses, or total self-composure). Although they thus become organized by cultural symbolic practices, they are usually understood as incorporating a core affective component—such as anger, joy, fear, sadness, or surprise—mediated by the biological infrastructures of individual organisms, who therefore have a prioritized phenomenological access to their own affective experiences (see, e.g., Wilce 2009; Kockelman 2013).

the feeling (i.e., the publicly perceivable effects of the object's existence). Her suggestion seems like an intuitive generalization, and, as illustrated by the leaders' immediate positive response, breaking down objects into any direction along the causal chains they are embedded in is perfectly in the spirit of the ideal of concreteness.[13]

We see that the epistemology under construction becomes gradually more nuanced. Maximally "concrete" does not always mean maximally explicit in denotational terms, but, rather, different objects of experience differ in terms of the preferred way of making them iconically and inferentially accessible to the interpreter. The most authentic or effective way of entextualizing a feeling may not be a linguistic description of that feeling per se but, instead, a description of its causal roots (i.e., what would give rise to it) or fruits (i.e., what would follow from it) so that the interpreter can infer the feeling and empathetically identify with the character.[14]

Let us return briefly to Ismail, the first participant to read his writing. Later, after another participant had already read her text, it turned out that Ismail had actually not read everything he had written. Persuaded by the leaders, he agrees to read the remaining lines. However, during his second reading, he still omits the last line and alters lines 6 and 7 denotationally and stylistically while reading:[15]

6	Kulta ei ole kun muissa maissa lapset, viaton siviili, naiset ja vanhuksia tapetaan ja pako heidän kotoa ja kun muissa maissa kaikki suju hyvin ja meitä ei kiinnosta heidän tuska [**reads**: "yhtään"].	It is not gold when in other countries children, innocent civilians, women and old people are killed and flee from their home and when in other countries all is well and we don't care about their pain [**reads**: "at all"].
7	Kulta ei ole kun istun bussissa [**reads**: "dösässä"] tai metro ja joku randomi tule huuta mene pois sinne mistä olet tullut.	It is not gold when I sit in the bus [**reads**: *slang*] or in the metro and some random [guy] comes and shouts go away [back] to where you came from.
8	Kulta ei ole jos joku sytää minua	It is not gold if someone blames me for

13. A couple of days later (July 6, 2016), while commenting on another writing, Aki praises its "good causalities" (hyvät kausaliteetit) in general. There is, in other words, a recurring emphasis on the importance of the observation and representation (or manipulation) of causal linkages between phenomena.

14. Similar principles were also dealt with in other contexts. For instance, while analyzing Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925), Aki draws attention to the role of speech in films and raises the question of expressing, for instance, "happiness" or "freedom" via action or images (June 30, 2016). Later, talking more generally about the principles of film narration, he also mentions the classic guideline "show, don't tell" (näytä älä kerro).

15. The last line nevertheless ended up in the script of the final piece (2016) in a slightly modified and standardized form ("Kultaa ei ole se, että minua syytetään valtion taloudellisista ongelmista"). As was noted earlier, during the scripting process, the leaders go through all the writings over and again in search of useful materials.

maan taloudellinen vaikeuksia. [**Not read**.]	the economic difficulties of the country. [**Not read.**]

In his immediate feedback, Aki praises the omitted lines as the "best ones," and in light of the previous discussion, it is easy to see why. Line 7, for instance, conforms somewhat perfectly to the guidelines above. It involves a concrete combination of setting (public transportation), characters (protagonist with Somali background; random passerby), and activities (verbal abuse) that readily serves as the roots of emotional responses. It mediates recognizable imagery of racist abuse that implies the feelings of the victim and evokes a corresponding response in the interpreter.

Ismail spontaneously replaces the formulation "don't care *about their pain*" with the less specific "don't care *at all*." Already on line 4 he had similarly replaced "dies from hunger and cold" with "have a hard time." On line 7, the slang word for "bus" is substituted for the more standard one. In each case, there is a perceivable contrast between the product of the writing process (a relatively private manifestation of the role of Artist) and the process of reading out loud to the group (a relatively public manifestation of the role of Artist). The shift of style from a more affective and literary one toward a more informal one might indicate that lines 6–8 are perceived as too personal or otherwise more difficult to utter in spoken form. In any case, the participants' responses to the rules and guidelines seem to advance at different speeds depending on the kind of medium and interactional setting in question.

Alternative Aesthetics

Sometimes the effects of the guidelines become visible quite immediately. As the feedback conversation progresses, the fifth participant, Miina, already knows how to self-evaluate her own contribution based on the guidelines. She both begins and ends her reading turn with a hedging acknowledgment that her contribution might not be very concrete either but, rather, "goes into spheres" (tää menee taas johonkin sellasiin sfääreihin). However, her self-evaluation is followed by a partial counterargument from the leaders who suggest that other forms of effective imagery can, in fact, be found in her text. In particular, they draw attention to successions of recognizable "states" (or "spaces," the Finnish *tila* can mean both) conjured up by the text. Moreover, the term "image" (kuva) now appears explicitly in the leaders' comments to describe the kinds of imagery that—unlike the prototypically "concrete" ones—do not foreground activities but are effective in other ways. Once again, then, the leaders introduce new

metasemiotic terms into the vocabulary of the technique to refine the epistemological structure when needed.

The leaders refer to line 15 in Miina's text as the point where its concreteness intensifies. It is noteworthy in light of the previous metasemiotic guidelines that line 15 itself does not foreground activities in any way. It situates an (implied) emotional state in an elaborately described space. It is nevertheless described by the leaders as a "recognizable image" by virtue of its combination of components. Similarly, one of the previous participant's formulations ("a young person alone on the [hospital] ward," [nuori yksin osastolla]) was acknowledged by Aki as a "strong image" (voimakas kuva) that immediately activated his personal memories.

15	Kultaa ei ole aamuyössä pimeässä huoneessa, tyhjyys seininnä jotka tuntuvat kaatuvan päälle [. . .]	It is not OR There is no gold in the small hours in a dark room, emptiness as the walls that seem to fall on [one] [. . .]
19	Kultaa ei ole turhautuminen	It is not gold, frustration
20	Kultaa ei ole turhautumisesta kasvava aggressio	It is not gold, the aggression growing out of frustration

Moreover, the leaders interpret line 15 as the beginning of a cluster of lines that can be read as a sequence of subjective "states." Later, lines 19–20 illustrate a more explicit causal sequence within one person's world of experience, a transition from frustration to aggression. In Maria's words, the interpreter cumulatively starts to "see that one person's frustration" (näkemään jotenki sen yhden ihmisen turhautumisen) and to "narrate the action in their own minds" (mielessään kertomaan sitä toimintaa).[16] In such cases, then, the effect of individual lines derives from their position in a sequence of images. Partly, the effect is attributed to the interpreter's ability to infer or imagine a set of activities around the described emotional dynamics.

16. We should also note that Maria, in passing, links some of the characteristics of Miina's writing to one of the stage exercises the group had done earlier that day. In fact, she seems to employ a relatively conscious strategy of linking the writing-based and acting-based activities with each other whenever possible. Such juxtaposition implicitly points precisely to "images"—that is, to a level of iconicity that can be seen as common for both media and, in some sense, as independent of the specific set of resources used in any particular type of task. Moreover, Aki, a dramaturgist, sporadically employs more specific professional terms, such as "central image" (keskuskuva), a composite concept that draws attention to the hierarchical organization and focusing of imagery. He also occasionally draws parallels between textual structures to film editing (e.g., by comparing "cuts" in textually mediated and cinematographic imagery). The concern with "images" and their cross-modal transferability between scripts and performances, then, becomes manifest to the participants in many different forms.

We can see that the epistemology hierarchically bifurcates into different subapproaches (and the meaning of "concrete" acquires polysemic variants). One may compose a single summary image of activities or states in their surroundings, or, alternatively, one may compose a sequence of interlinked and textually cumulative states. The latter variant seems to suit, in particular, the kinds of intrasubjective dynamics that are difficult to describe in terms of activities or surroundings. The criteria of concreteness are satisfied as long as there are recognizable and affectively relatable points of contrast between successive images (e.g., between frustration and aggression). One might say that the format allows for alternative aesthetics of concreteness.

Formats of Experience-Transformation

Finally, let us take a more detailed look at the formal characteristics of the writing technique. After all, the particular discursive format employed in each writing task functions as a crucial intermediary or sieving pattern with which the participants scan their objects of experience. Any particular format tends to highlight the kinds of objects that can be readily transformed into linguistic sign configurations that fit the structural requirements of the format. Like cameras in photography, the format mediates the transformation of experiences into artifactual forms in specific ways through its structural characteristics. Moreover, it structurally standardizes the contributions, as each participant operates with the same format.

Semantically speaking, "gold" functions as a conventionalized metaphor standing for particularly valuable objects of experience. It invites evaluative stances that make the writers' preferences and value hierarchies explicit. In the negated case, the format mobilizes descriptions of nonvalued objects of experience. As a pragmatically marked act, negation presupposes the affirmative alternative as background on the basis of some contextual motivation, and often a negation signals a dialogical stance, such as a contrast between one's own and others' values. The "It is not gold" format foregrounds the kinds of experiences that the writer explicitly wishes to deny "gold" class membership (implying something specifically "ungolden," rather than anything "nongolden"). In fact, during the feedback conversation, Aki wonders about the clear difference in the contributions between this task and the previous "It is gold" task. Where the affirmative framing elicited positive "experiences" (elämyksiä) of all kinds, the latter one seemed to elicit a lot of "moralities" (moraliteetteja).

The discursive format consists of a nonvariable three-word pattern (*kultaa ei ole*) that is repeated for each line.[17] Specific grammatical and semantic conditions regulate the range of variable constituents that can be combined with the nonvariable one. The contributions above show that the format can be interpreted as projecting two alternative sentence frames: (*a*) "*X* is not gold" and (*b*) "There is no gold [in] *X*." In other words, the first one uses the concept of gold as an evaluative classification, whereas the latter projects the metaphorical gold as an entity within the narrated world of discourse.

A.	Kulta-a	ei	ole	[GRAMMATICAL SUBJECT]
	gold-PARTITIVE	NEGATION (3SG)	COPULA	
	As in, for example, "It is not gold, frustration"			
B.	Kulta-a	ei	ole	[ADVERBIAL OF TIME OR PLACE]
	gold-PARTITIVE	NEGATION (3SG)	be/exist	
	As in, for example, "There is no gold in the small hours, in a dark room [. . .]"			

The two sentence frames differ in terms of the range of constituents they can be supplemented with. Whereas the latter mainly allows for adverbials of time or place, the former is missing the grammatical subject that can be a noun phrase ("a young person alone on the ward"), an infinitive ("to sit alone anguished"), or a clause ("when I sit in the bus or in the metro and . . ."). The different options formulate different types of objects—entities (noun phrases), processes (infinitives), and events (clauses)—and, thus, structure the object of experience differently in terms of time, space, and personhood.

The format also gives rise to a particular pattern of text-level indexical relations. The repetition of the nonvariable part of the format and its alternation with improvised, variable parts yields a specific rhythmic and metrical pattern—which may also be read as a specific kind of "mind style" (Semino 2007) or "view of subjectivity" (Lee 1997a). From a semantic point of view, this pattern of entextualization produces a relatively nonlinear textual structure in which consecutive lines need not necessarily relate to one another in terms of any semio-cognitive coherence. Rather, they form a hierarchical structure in which consecutive lines relate to one another as relatively independent same-level coconstituents—that is, as parallel instances of the same general pattern. Apart from the cases seen above in which consecutive lines form loose chronological and causal sequences, the positioning of individual lines in relation to one another has relatively

17. The participants were also instructed that they could just keep on producing sentences that begin with the format without lifting their pencils off the paper and without getting stuck or stopping to worry about the result. From this perspective, the technique might be described as a kind of associative forced writing or automatic writing method.

little importance to the overall intelligibility of the text (see also Hoey [2001] on "colony texts"). However, the contrastive accumulation of parallel lines readily activates the question of value hierarchies. For instance, toward the end of the feedback discussion, Maria draws attention to the fact that one of the writings combined "big" issues (e.g., insecurity) with ones that some might consider "small" ones (e.g., smoking). Since the format explicitly projects "big" things that can be conceptualized as (not) "gold," it also begs the question of what is (not) "big" enough to be included. Including a "small" constituent or progressing from "bigger" to "smaller" things may be a potential cause of incoherence. However, Maria emphasizes that marked, "illogical" contrasts can also be quite effective and become positively valued as "interesting" by others. Her point, then, is merely to draw attention to the different ways in which such discursive constructions embody value hierarchies and contrasts.

These formal characteristics set constraints on how the technique can be used to transform experiences into communicable and reworkable textures. Nevertheless, the participants also find ways of bending the constraints. For instance, Azim's writing consists of a variety of sections in which the use of the format is varied, rather than of "lines" (i.e., metrically regular units of the whole). In the first section, the format functions as an evaluative device in a densely packed mininarrative or "small story" (see, e.g., Bamberg 2006). The format is used anaphorically to refer to the previous sequence of events in an independent clause ("that is not gold").

Kun muutat maaseudulta	When you move from the countryside
pääkaupunkiin ja sulla on hirvee	to the capital and you have an awful
murre sillo sua dissataan koulussa	dialect then you are dissed at school
tai kotipihalla se ei oo kultaa.	or in the home yard that is not gold.

Similarly, in the third section, the format is embedded in an even longer narrative about a girl who finally moves away from home only to realize that living alone is not as rosy as she thought it would be. The end of the narrative sums up the moral of the story: "so she thinks she no longer has any gold" (ni hän miettii ettei hänellä oo enään mitään kultaa). Here, the "gold" is not only projected into the narrated world of discourse but incorporated into the voice of a character within that world.[18] We see, then, that the format can be creatively or

18. The fourth section is an even longer and more complex narrative (about one minute when read out loud). While reading, Azim stops before the fourth section and asks whether he should go on or not, probably sensing that his contribution is markedly different from the others. Maria encourages him to continue, noting that "these are really good situations" (näähän on todella hyvii tilanteita). In other words, the specificity and

strategically flouted in a number of ways—and the repetition might even invite the writer to look for paths around the constraints (cf. also Wilf 2014, 402).

Professional Perception and Technological Formations

Let us now take a closer look at the characteristics of the channel and the capacities it requires. We have seen that, in order to inhabit the role of Artist, the participants need to learn to relate to their personal experience in technically specific ways. Drawing on Goodwin's (1994, 2000) notion of "professional vision," we may say that the technique examined above involves "professional perception." However, the primary objects of observation are not aspects of the immediate environment (cf. Wilf 2013, 135–42) but the accumulated memories of the individual. Such observation may be said to involve "subsequent perception," in which the original perception of a state of affairs and its discursive representation are spatiotemporally separated from each other, or stand in a relation of displaced contiguity (see Kockelman 2006, 98–99). As Artists, the participants reflexively scan their own memory-stored perceptions and selectively highlight and engage with the kinds of objects that appear valuable in light of professional criteria. It is, then, a technical reobservation of past experiences aimed at channeling those experiences to the group's joint discursive space.

Professional perception becomes empirically manifested in, and learned through, "epistemic formations" (Kockelman 2013, 168–69, 181–82). Epistemic formations are semiotic processes that consist in coordinated relations between "empirical investigations" (how one observes one's world of experience), "theoretical representations" (how one articulates and rationalizes one's observations), and "practical interventions" (how one acts on one's observations on the basis of one's theoretical representations). For instance, as was seen in the previous section, the feedback conversations mainly consist of empirical observations directed at the structures and effects of the participants' writings. Such observations become articulated as theoretical representations concerning, for instance, the "concreteness" of the imagery mediated by specific formulations. The empirical observations and their theoretical representations become publicly

concreteness of the narrated situations is positively evaluated. However, the leaders take a slightly different tone when it comes to the story form and the perceived fictivity of Azim's contributions. The discussion implies once again that formulations anchored in relatively immediate personal experience are preferred over more elaborate fabrications relying on imagined or radically restructured experiences. It appears that, for the purposes of this technique, stories are appropriate, since they can be broken down into more basic imagery, but they are simply somewhat superfluous, since the story form itself probably has little use in subsequent phases of scripting and recomposition.

manifested in the participants' practical interventions, such as evaluative stances or suggestions for reformulations guided by the rules of social interaction.

In contrast to photography-based or videography-based tasks (see Visakko 2020), discursive semiosis has a pervasive role in the technique examined above. Language is not only the medium of theoretical reflection and social regimentation in the feedback conversations but also the primary medium through which the memory-stored object-experiences become recorded, reformulated, and reframed. In other words, such formations are layered or nested. First, a specific discursive format (e.g., "It is not gold") is used to represent introspectively observed personal experiences during the writing process—and an important kind of self-intervention at this point is to refrain from writing about an observation that contradicts the rules by being too "intimate." Second, a specific metasemiotic terminology is used to represent observations about the written observations and to model editing interventions during the feedback conversations. The usages of such terms as "concrete," "manifest," "arise," "show," "spaces," "states," and "images" make parts of the underlying epistemological structure explicit.[19]

It should be underlined that the aim of such layered empirical investigations and practical interventions is always to produce a material result that can be improved in the subsequent phases of the creative process. That is, the aim is to transform the original object of observation into a reworkable artifactual form, and the ultimate aim of the chain of activities is to give rise to a specific kind of skilled artifact, a work of art. If one wishes to foreground these artifactual, technical, and transformative aspects of such processes, one might call them "technological formations." The notion of "channel," in contrast, emphasizes the interpersonal contacts established through such processes, or the skill of operating with gaps and bridges between people (see Lemon 2017, 30–32).

As was seen in the analyses, much of the clarification of what is meant by "concrete" as a technical term, as opposed to an everyday word, is achieved through indexical processes of object analysis (what segmentable particulars can be perceived in the text), contrastive evaluation (which particulars are more ideal than others), and (counter-)modeling (what kinds of alternatives might be considered). Such practical processes calibrate the term to "diacritics" (cf. Agha 2007a, 136), or types of perceivable indices that enable the distinction of "concrete" objects from "nonconcrete" ones. In a more mediate way, the

19. However, all of the epistemological structure does not become formulated in propositionally explicit terms. The notion of "value," for instance, does not figure as a central metasemiotic term, although the particular format examined above was aimed at the elicitation of value hierarchies and contrasts.

Figure 2. A glimpse of the final "gold" scene

ability to make such distinctions—to know what is or is not appropriate for the channel—is in itself a role diacritic that differentiates Artists from non-Artists (cf. Lemon 2017, 27–28).

Phrased differently, the technique foregrounds a specific mode of "emblematicity," or a specific way in which signs are made maximally interpretable for others (Kockelman 2013, 74–80; see also Agha 2007a, 242–50). Artists should be able to transform their personal experiences in controlled and nuanced ways into cross-modal sign patterns that travel along the channel toward subsequent phases of the creative process. A key concern in the examples above was "phenomenological" emblematicity (Kockelman 2013, 77). The maximal perceivability and accessibility of the results of the creative process were continuously monitored. At later stages of the process, the imagery mediated by the writings needs to be transformed into other kinds of performable and aesthetically effective forms (e.g., stage designs, props, actor positions, gestures, or verbal lines with contents, rhythms, tones, and other qualities; see fig. 2).[20] What cannot be made distinctly visible, audible, or otherwise tangible in terms of phenomenological qualities for the audience is ultimately of little use onstage.

The Spectators, the imagined ultimate addressees at the other end of the channel, constitute a kind of generalized other whose perspective serves as the origo of evaluation and whose anticipated interpretations serve as the criteria of evaluation during the creative process. Importantly, however, ideal interpretability does not necessarily mean maximal explicitness, logicality, or one-to-oneness in terms of propositional or inferential articulation—unlike in, say, scientific

20. The final scene of the piece consisted of "It is gold" lines interspersed with "It is not gold" lines. Performers uttered lines (or parts of long lines) alternately, standing still but occasionally shifting their gaze from the audience toward another performer. The scene was set to slow, melodic piano music.

contexts. Rather, a certain degree of ambiguity, polyvocality, or implicitness is often preferred, as it engages the interpreters to look for meaningful links with other elements in the work and within their own worlds of experience. Meanings that are too "on the nose" are often less likely to be considered, say, "subtle," "skillful," or "authentic." Emblematicity, in other words, gets caught up in aesthetic ideologies.

Conclusion

This article has explored the collective reflection of personal experiences in a multiethnic community theater setting through a specific writing technique. It has analyzed a specific semiotic technology that enables the formation of interpersonal contacts across categories of identity in a socially diverse group and the transformation of selected personal experiences, under specific rules and principles, into discursive artifacts that contribute to the group's joint voice. In other words, the role of Artist serves as a discursive intermediary between an individual identity, from which "input" is sourced, and a chain of other roles, such as Scriptwriter, Director, Performer, Character, and Spectator, to which the results are fed as "output." The article has aimed to uncover the underlying epistemological structures that regulate the participants' social interactions, self-observations, and patterns of entextualization. The analyses have illustrated the concrete steps through which epistemological transformation is sought in the process of role socialization—and how it opens up new kinds of interpersonal channels. Moreover, the aim has been to demonstrate how the participants step by step adopt a professional perception of their past experiences.

The analysis of the writing technique has also showed how the discursive elaboration of the settings, relations, and causalities of one's past experiences functions as a kind of exploration into the "systemic" aspects of one's experience. Moreover, the collective project encourages the participants to genuinely encounter others from a variety of walks of life—and provides a social structure for such encounters. Each year in the final interviews and questionnaires, the participants reported positive changes, such as how the project had given them new insights into their lives or reduced their fear of public self-expression. The role of Artist appears to constitute a new kind of position within the identity of the individual, from which the individual is able to observe oneself under a new kind of attitude and to express oneself with specific techniques. In fact, it often seemed that the participants' professionalism became strengthened precisely by the more personal materials they worked on. For instance, a notably more serious attitude could be immediately observed when dealing with

writings based on someone's difficult and emotional experiences, such as the death of someone close.

In a sense, the value of professional roles and techniques becomes more prominent when dealing with materials that are difficult for one's "everyday" self. Such challenging tasks show that even the more painful aspects of one's life have value as materials for art making and can be dealt with in a more technical or "insulated" manner (see also Moschou and Anaya Rodriguez 2016, 29). They can be transformed into something that is of value both for oneself and for others. Epistemological transformation or professional perception alone, then, is not sufficient for liminoid flexibility, but the cooperation of others—both as empathetic individuals and as complementary role relations (co-Artists, Mentors, Directors, Spectators)—is needed.

References

Agha, Asif. 2007a. *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2007b. "Recombinant Selves in Mass Mediated Spacetime." *Language and Communication* 27 (3): 320–35.

Atkin, Albert. 2010. "Peirce's Theory of Signs." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics.

Bamberg, Michael. 2006. "Stories: Big or Small; Why Do We Care?" *Narrative Inquiry* 16 (1): 139–47.

Bateson, Gregory. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Becker, Howard. 1982. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Brandom, Robert B. 2000. *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dewey, John. (1934) 2005. *Art as Experience*. New York: Penguin.

Diba, Denise, and Ana Flavia d'Oliveira. 2015. "Community Theater as Social Support for Youth: Agents in the Promotion of Health." *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* 20 (5): 1353–62.

Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Surveiller et punir*. Paris: Gallimard.

———. 2001. *Dits et écrits II*. Paris: Gallimard.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

———. 1981. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Goodwin, Charles. 1994. "Professional Vision." *American Anthropologist* 96 (3): 606–33.

———. 2000. "Practices of Color Classification." *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 7 (1–2): 19–36.

Harjunpää, Katariina, Arnulf Depperman, and Marja-Leena Sorjonen. Forthcoming. "Constructing the Chekhovian *Inner Body* in Instructions: An Interactional History of Factuality and Agentivity." *Journal of Pragmatics*.

Hoey, Michael. 2001. *Textual Interaction: An Introduction to Written Discourse Analysis*. New York: Routledge.

Jefferson, Gail. 1983. "Issues in the Transcription of Naturally-Occurring Talk: Caricature vs. Capturing Pronunciational Particulars." *Tilburg Papers in Language and Literature*, no. 34:1–12.

Keane, Webb. 2018. "On Semiotic Ideology." *Signs and Society* 6 (1): 64–87.

Kockelman, Paul. 2004. "Stance and Subjectivity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 14 (2): 127–50.

———. 2006. "Representations of the World: Memories, Perceptions, Beliefs, Intentions, and Plans." *Semiotica* 162 (1): 73–125.

———. 2010. *Language, Culture, and Mind: Natural Constructions and Social Kinds*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2013. *Agent, Person, Subject, Self: A Theory of Ontology, Interaction, and Infrastructure*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kramer, Michael. 2002. "Communication in a Community Theater Group: Managing Multiple Group Roles." *Communication Studies* 53 (2): 151–70.

Lee, Benjamin. 1997a. "Metalanguages and Subjectivities." In *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*, edited by John Lucy, 365–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1997b. *Talking Heads: Language, Metalanguage, and the Semiotics of Subjectivity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lemon, Alaina. 2017. *Technologies for Intuition: Cold War Circles and Telepathic Rays*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Mead, George H. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moschou, Christiana, and Roberto Anaya Rodriguez. 2016. "The Formation of Citizenship through Community Theatre: A Study in Aguascalientes, Mexico." *Journal of Social Science Education* 15 (4): 22–31.

Oddey, Alison. 1994. *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*. New York: Routledge.

Petit, Lenard. 2010. *The Michael Chekhov Handbook: For the Actor*. London: Routledge.

Sawyer, Keith. 2003. *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration*. New York: Routledge.

Semino, Elena. 2007. "Mind Style Twenty Five Years On." *Style* 41 (2): 135–73.

Shiner, Larry. 2001. *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Silverstein, Michael. 2003. "Indexical Order and the Dialectics of Sociolinguistic Life." *Language and Communication* 23 (3–4): 193–229.

Solin, Anna, and Niina Hynninen. 2018. "Regulating the Language of Research Writing: Disciplinary and Institutional Mechanisms." *Language and Education* 32 (6): 494–510.

Turner, Victor. 1982. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications.

Visakko, Tomi. 2020. "Looking at the Self in Society: Professional Perception and Midgroundable Roles in Community Theater." *Signs and Society* 8 (2): 262–89.

Wilce, James. 2009. *Language and Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilf, Eitan. 2011. "Sincerity versus Self-Expression: Modern Creative Agency and the Materiality of Semiotic Forms." *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (3): 462–84.

———. 2013. "Streamlining the Muse: Creative Agency and the Reconfiguration of Charismatic Education as Professional Training in Israeli Poetry Writing Workshops." *Ethos* 41 (2): 127–49.

———. 2014. "Semiotic Dimensions of Creativity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43:397–412.