

A Swedish Perspective on Cinematic Research Projects

by Marianne Persson

Conducting research within the arts is a difficult task in Sweden. The existing research tradition is poor, and there is little experience to refer to or compare with. As a senior lecturer at an arts university, moreover with a specialisation in film production, a field lacking artistic prestige and sometimes considered unnecessary, I am situated in the midst of an academic subject where art, creation, and commerce intersect. It is thus very important that coursework focuses on producing the work conceived in the creative departments of scriptwriting and directing.

To document, not reinvent

Until recently, the world of artistic creation had difficulties to be taken seriously by research institutions and to obtain funding for basic research projects, due to fierce competition from the more trained scientific fields. The problem for artistic projects is not only their struggle for academic validity, but also the intense competition for funds. Another difficulty is the dominance of other fields of research, with a different language and attitude, with established research methods, and whose findings and results attract greater interest from funding bodies. Moreover, many more experts are already involved in assessing the quality of the academic level of these fields.

The first step is to make teachers and professors teaching film and the performing arts to understand that their duty is to document, analyse, and develop their art and its progress at this point in time. Neither established nor new art schools have developed the teaching knowledge and skills that could be conveyed to new staff and students. Failing research and scientific investigation, standards decline and subjects need to be reinvented by each generation.

In the last few years, funding bodies and some professions have understood the importance of higher education goals, which must also be fulfilled in the endeavour to attain advanced levels of knowledge. Swedish arts universities comprise as many as seven separate schools: dance, music, opera, film and theatre, acting, art and design, fine arts. They have started to apply for research funds from *Vetenskapsrådet* (Swedish Research Council) where all other academic and scientific institutions apply for their research projects. Established traditions and knowledge are scarce in our seven streams of art education. Research projects must therefore obtain proof of competence to be able to apply for further projects. Research is a continuous process and not just a single step or leap of faith. The diversity of the arts places significant responsibility on the experts assessing these specialised applications. One structural weakness of a small country is that the specialists are all the same; consequently, they sit on too many boards and establish common, fixed standards of taste. Such a situation should encourage more international collaboration on both projects and juries, and also afford a wider range of experiences to researchers and results.

Mixing the arts

The future of our school (*Dramatiska Institutet*) is about to change, due to a merger with the acting school (*Teaterhögskolan*). Our student roll will increase from about 150 students to about 230, with 150 Bachelor's and 80 Master's students.

One of the main purposes of this new structure, apart from all other benefits of mixing the arts, is described as follows in a paper co-authored by the deans of the two schools involved in the merger:

«Firm grip on artistic research – A new arts university obtains a greater critical mass to develop both researcher training and work at an advanced level. The overall dispositions in the scientific area will be stronger than today and will lead to more collaborations within education and research, also within an international perspective.»¹

Further down, the deans' statement also draws attention to the perceived pedagogic merits of the merger: it will enhance flexi-

bility between programmes, broaden professional knowledge, and encourage new combinations. Consequently, the pressure lies on teaching staff in the first instance, who need to develop new approaches to teaching and receive training in new subjects. Specialisations will also change as a result of the merger.

Every academic year, 80 Master's students will be encouraged to study for Master's degrees in new subjects, so the pool for recruiting scientists will be growing. All this will take time and not only students but also teachers and professors will have to change.

Silent knowledge

Based on a method used to develop so-called silent knowledge, my own research at a higher level has amounted to a pedagogic reflection on art education. *Silent knowledge* is knowledge based on personal experience that is subsequently condensed into a generalisation of human experience and analysed within a theoretical context. In brief, it is an expression used for what we know practically and deeply but cannot always explain in theoretical terms to someone who does not know. *Silent Knowledge theories* were developed by Ingela Josefson,² formerly dean at Södertörn University in Sweden, in the 1980s as a theory closely connected with Artificial Intelligence studies.

My pedagogic reflection focused on my own dilemma as a teacher. It presented me with a serious conflict, which I vividly remember struggling with to understand and resolve, since it challenged my knowledge so fundamentally. It forced me to return to my situation as a professional and becoming a teacher, as well as all the positioning between theories and practical uses that I was choosing for my teaching programme. While those were difficult times, since I was exposed to many unknowns, they offered me an excellent opportunity for critical reflection on my own work, as both producer and teacher. My reflections compared my ambitions as a teacher with those as a filmmaker. In any event, all this work was a start and I understood the importance of reflection, analysis, and renewal of a teaching method. As an individual, I could feel that I had found some tools to contend with the anxieties involved in teaching and with methods for placing the responsibility for learning on students. This was a relief but also a new way of seeing things.

I firmly believe in reflective work based on one's own efforts, whether in writing or orally. Written statements and records tend to remain and also be kept for later reading as reminders of changing times. Film education focuses so much on students' own productions that critical reflection is usually quite shallow because the lessons learned from making a film take time to become apparent. I would therefore advocate all disciplines at film school to undertake more in-depth writing projects. I also know that our recruiting systems are based on practical knowledge, but theory and theorising must now return as the practical uses are easy to learn.

As a final remark, I would like to quote a friend based at a Technical University: only research counts nowadays, basic training is self-evident, and the development of a university and its place amid fierce competition depends on its research results.

Competition is everywhere and we all want to know best.

1 My translation from Swedish.

2 Her key study is *Läkarens yrkeskunnande*, Lund 1998 .

Zusammenfassung

Marianne Persson: Filmforschung aus schwedischer Sicht

Marianne Persson, Professorin für Filmproduktion am Dramatiska Institutet in Stockholm, setzt sich in ihrem Beitrag zunächst mit den aktuellen Herausforderungen an die künstlerische Forschung in Schweden auseinander, die im Schatten der traditions- und prestigereichen, wissenschaftlichen Forschung steht. Im Weiteren geht sie auf die Situation am Dramatiska Institutet ein, wo sich nach einer Fusion im Hochschulbereich von Film, Radio, TV mit dem Theater neue Möglichkeiten im Bereich interdisziplinärer Lehre und Forschung eröffnen.

Ein erster Schritt zur Erfüllung des Forschungsauftrages besteht für die Autorin darin, Professoren, Dozierende und Studierende dazu zu bringen, ihre Praxis so zu dokumentieren, dass sie auch weiter entwickelt und vermittelt werden kann. Anhand ihrer eigenen Forschung zeigt sie zudem, wie wichtig im Alltag neben der eigenen Praxis deren vertiefte theoretische Reflexion in schriftlicher und damit allgemein zugänglicher und überlieferbarer Form ist. Die kritische Analyse und Selbstreflexion ihres Dilemmas zwischen Theorie und Praxis, als Filmproduzentin und Dozentin, die auf den Theorien des Silent Knowledge basiert (vgl. Ingela Josefson: Läkarens yrkeskunskande, Lund 1998) und im Wesentlichen aus der Reflexion und Nutzbarmachung einer persönlichen Erfahrung für die Allgemeinheit besteht, versteht sie als Beitrag zur Weiterentwicklung der Pädagogik an Kunsthochschulen.