

Augmented Paper Diary Method for capturing the aesthetic experience in Ceramic Practice

Priska Falin

priska.falin@aalto.fi

PO Box 31000, FI 00076 Aalto, Finland

Abstract

This paper introduces an explorative method that focuses on the subjective process of an artist-researcher. The art practice that is under scrutiny in this paper is part of an artistic research that explores the ceramic practice from the perspective of aesthetics. The introduced method combines three different ways of data collection: pre-designed questionnaires, the *end of the day* diary and material pockets. The aim of designing the method was to explore the influence of aesthetic experience in a creative process and to focus on the meaningful aspects of artistic practice. A mistake in the questionnaire and the ill-fitted design for the practice demonstrated gaps that need to be taken account when planning a practice-led method. The literary review shows that the use of documentation is vital for the practice-led research, however little has been written and researched on how it has been conducted.

KEYWORDS: Aesthetic Experience, Creative Process, Diary, Practice-led Methods, Practice-Led Research

Introduction

The purpose of a diary, as well many other practice-led methods, in the research context is to capture the researchers' own activity and to open an access to one's creative process while conducting it. Keeping a diary of the research process is a record of thoughts, feelings and experiences from which the researcher can learn insights or use it as an evidence of the research (Glaze 2002, 155). The diary is used in many cases as a retrospective data collection tool, because the creative process can be difficult to pause in the middle of it. Therefore the diary entries are often made after the event as an *end of the day* diary manner. In this study, the method described was based on using diary for the documentation of my creative process and expanded with questionnaires and material pockets. The method was designed to capture reflections from my subjective artistic research process during and after the artistic activities. The method was pre-designed especially for a two-week long workshop and was used as a specific tool for collecting material out of a site-specific and time limited creative process with targeted research goals.

In this paper I mainly focus on the use of diary as research method for capturing the creative process while conducting it and how the method turned out to work in the end. In order to understand the diary itself, it needs to be looked at from the historical perspective. In his research on why people write diaries, Lejeune (2000) finds connections to self-examinations, the ideas of a letter to oneself, confessions, records of a life process and to a dialogue with the past and the future (Rak 2000, 19-20). In historical perspective, diaries have given an inside view on great

artistic works and thinking processes e.g. in the cases of Leonardo Da Vinci (Lahdensuu 2009) and Frida Kahlo (Fuentes 1995). Whether the diary is a personal diary or in the use of a research, it is still “firmly committed to the first-person narrative; but not to an addressee” (Paperno 2004, 562). Concentrating on the subjective experience in practice-led research, the diary is a natural way to capture this process. The subjective viewpoint is regarded as a distinctive feature of practice-led research (Mäkelä 2007, 160; Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011, 38; Pedgley 2007).

In practice-led research, the diary has been referred to as documentation or making notes (Nimkulrat 2009, 55; Nimkulrat 2007; Turpeinen 2005, 31; Mäkelä & Nimkulrat 2011) of or during the artistic research process. The aim of the documentation is to make the creative process transparent (Nimkulrat 2007, 3). The transparency is beneficial for the researcher herself as well as for the audience of the research. From the starting point of practice-led research, the diary has been used as part of the research methods. Ceramic artist Maarit Mäkelä (2003) for instance, in her doctoral dissertation, used quotes from her working diary as a research material (Mäkelä 2003, 116-117). Looking at academic dissertations that are conducted by practice-led approach, reveals that diary, or other forms of diary like notebooks, are elemental parts of practice-led research (Mäkelä & Nimkulrat 2011, Turpeinen 2005), still very little have been written on how researchers use or design the diary methods especially in the fields of art and design. In psychological research, the diary methods have influenced heavily on how and where the daily experiences of research participants can be collected and although being new to psychology “... diary study designs are changing the way psychologists think about psychological process.” (Iida, Shrout, Laurenceau & Bolger 2012).

One of the examples of diary method developed particularly for design research purposes is industrial designer Owen Pedgley’s article: Capturing and analysing own design activity (Pedgley 2007). Pedgley points out that the use of the diary as a design research tool is rare, because of its associations with longitudinal activity analyses (ibid, 471). In social sciences, the diary has been widely used as a source of data (ibid, 470). For instance when participant observation has been difficult to conduct or the observation might have influenced the participants’ behavior (Jacelon & Imperio 2005; Zimmerman & Wieder 1977).

The workshop environment and the structure of the diary

The study presented in this paper was executed in a two-week long workshop located in Egersund Denmark. This is a special site where Brick Factories have been located for over 300 years in the same places and in some cases also with the same families. For me the medium of bricks and the factory processes was new and it was possible to pursue according to the workshop participants' own personal interests. The element of novelty, being in that location for the first time and familiarizing to a new medium, was beneficial for testing and elaborating the diary method. Everything during the workshop was part of the whole experience and potential material for the artistic process. All the material produced during the process can be regarded as part of one particular artistic process. From research perspective, the workshop had two goals: to document and capture my own artistic process and to explore the aesthetic dimension in the context of an art practice. These two goals were entwined and supported each other.

The Structure of the diary

The theoretical frame for the aesthetics in this research is drawn from John Dewey’s (2005) ideas of aesthetic experience and Arnold Berleant’s (1991) concept of the aesthetic engagement. Focusing on Dewey’s idea of having an experience (Dewey 2005, 36-59) lays the basis for exploring the ways of capturing the subjective experiences with the special focus on aesthetic qualities. Falin & Falin (2014) have opened the discussion about the meaning of aesthetic experience in the context of artistic research with the help of the concept of “process aesthetics”.

The concept of process aesthetics is based on the artistic works produced in the research context concentrating on ceramic material processes with aesthetic quality by the author. The idea of process aesthetics was further explored with artistic practice in the workshop described in this paper.

I constructed the diary in three parts with questionnaires, diary pages for free writing and pockets for material. The whole diary (Figure 1.) was pre-designed based on the information about the workshop, research goals and the anticipated results. The title for the diary was: *Experience and having an experience: Exploring the influence of an experience during the art practice*. The having an experience is based on the ideas of John Dewey (2005) and the questions formulated in the questionnaire are directed from this basis. The questionnaire was inspired by the Contextual Activity Sampling System (CASS) that is a Java-application for collecting process- and context-sensitive data for example on events and experiences during a process (Seitamaa-Hakkarainen & al. 2013). CASS-query application for mobile phone is developed for contextually tracking of activities (Muukkonen & al. 2009). The manual questionnaires expanded the idea of a diary and later I added the plastic material pockets to create connections between emotions and tangible material objects. Although the CASS- query tool is very easy to use with mobile phone, the manual form of the diary had the potential of adjusting the method during the workshop to suit the purpose and to add notes or other information about the method itself and to collect tangible material related to a particular experience.

I planned the pre-designed diary so that it would be filled out in three (see Figure 1.) different categories: Part A was to be filled when the experience was focused on learning and getting to know the new medium and environment, Part B was directed towards the art practice itself and the Part C was for diary reflections in an *end of the day* manner to be written down capturing all of the days' experiences. Parts A and B were directed mainly to the questionnaires (see Figure 2.), so that when answering a questionnaire it would be indicated whether the experience was focused on learning (A) or the art practice (B).

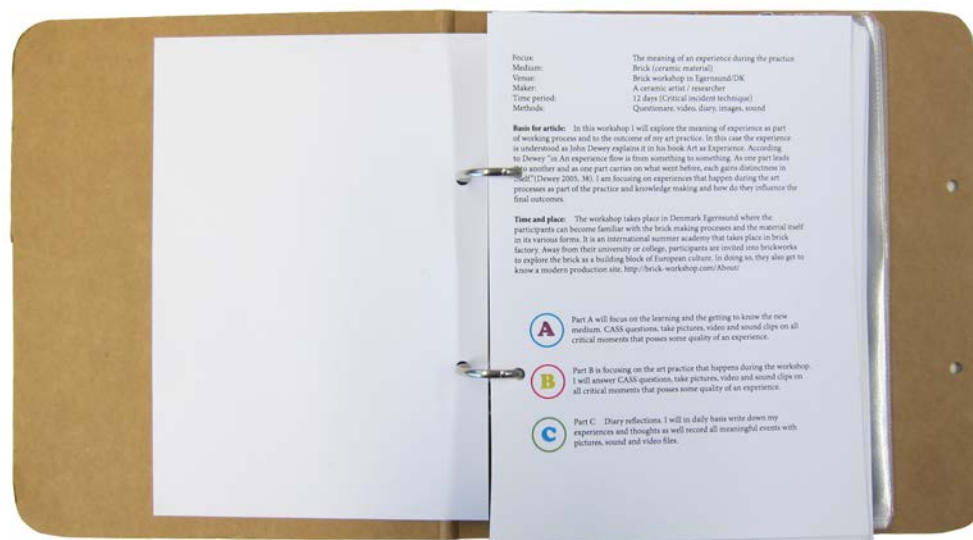


Figure 1. The Diary with the research focus and directions with A, B and C sections

The first part of the diary, the questionnaire (Figure 2.) was planned so that it would be filled out everyday at least two or three times in order to produce enough material for the analyzing process that would take place after the entire workshop has ended. The questions were designed for capturing the experience while it was ongoing or just happened. There were 20 questions in the questionnaire with answers from 1 to 7, following the likert scale (Johns 2010).

The questions targeted mainly the feelings, difficulties or enjoyment and the motivation of the experience e.g. with a question: How creative do you feel? The numbers 1-7 indicates the scale of the answer from the lowest level in number 1 to the highest level in number 7. Before the questions that could be answered with numbers, there were introductory questions to describe the circumstances and the nature of the experience.

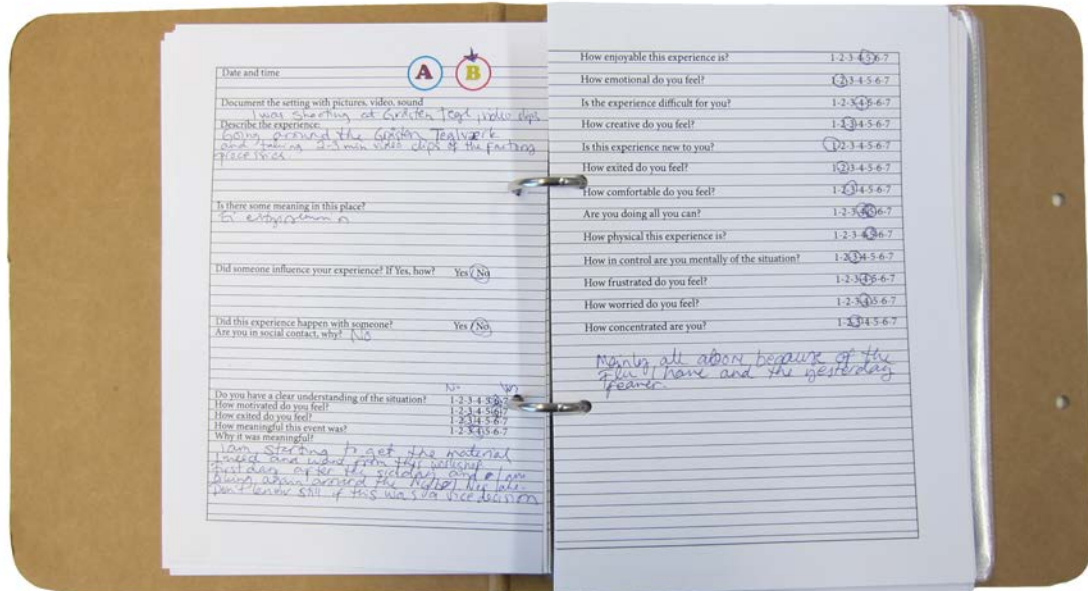


Figure 2. The Questionnaire as part of the Diary method

The second part of the diary, the 'diary pages' were planned in an *end of the day* –manner. Meaning that at the end of each day the whole day's experiences would be reflected. There was enough space for drawings, notes and writing and the quality of the paper was selected to suit the needs of sketching or drawing if necessary (Figure 3.). The free writing diary part had structure from the research questions and overall topic.

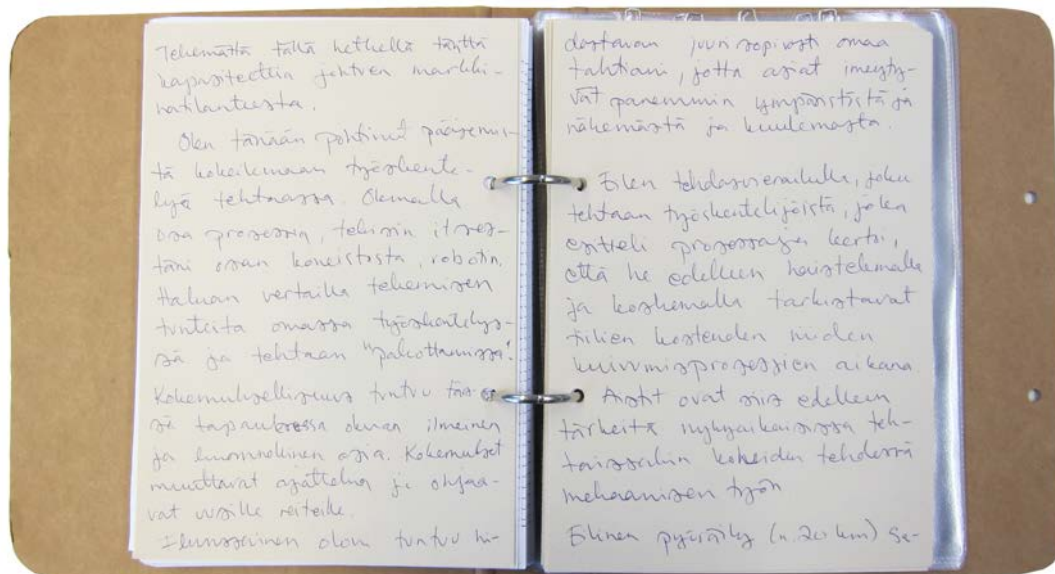


Figure 3. Second part of the Diary: *the end of the day* diary pages for free writing

The third part of the diary was pockets (Figure 4.) for collecting meaningful tangible material that had some part in the experiences during the artistic practice. The intended aspect of the pockets was to include the material dimension with the analyzing process. From my own previous experience of ceramic art practice, the anticipation was that the artistic practice is engaging the practitioner with all the senses and the materiality is a vital part of it. After the workshop, there were only two little parts of bricks collected in the pockets. The lack of tangible material can be due to the fact that the filling the questionnaires and the locations of the actual experiences didn't always meet. In many cases, I had already moved into another location where it was peaceful to concentrate on the diary. That location had different material surroundings that the surroundings of the targeted art practice.



Figure 4. Pockets for collecting meaningful material related to the experiences

The Environment

Egernsund, where the Brick workshop took place, is in the most southern part of Denmark and near to the German border. Figure 5. shows the brick factories around Nybol Nor that were part of the workshop venues and the home location where all the workshop participants stayed during the workshop. All together the journey around Nybol Nor was around 20 km and the means for travelling was by bicycle.

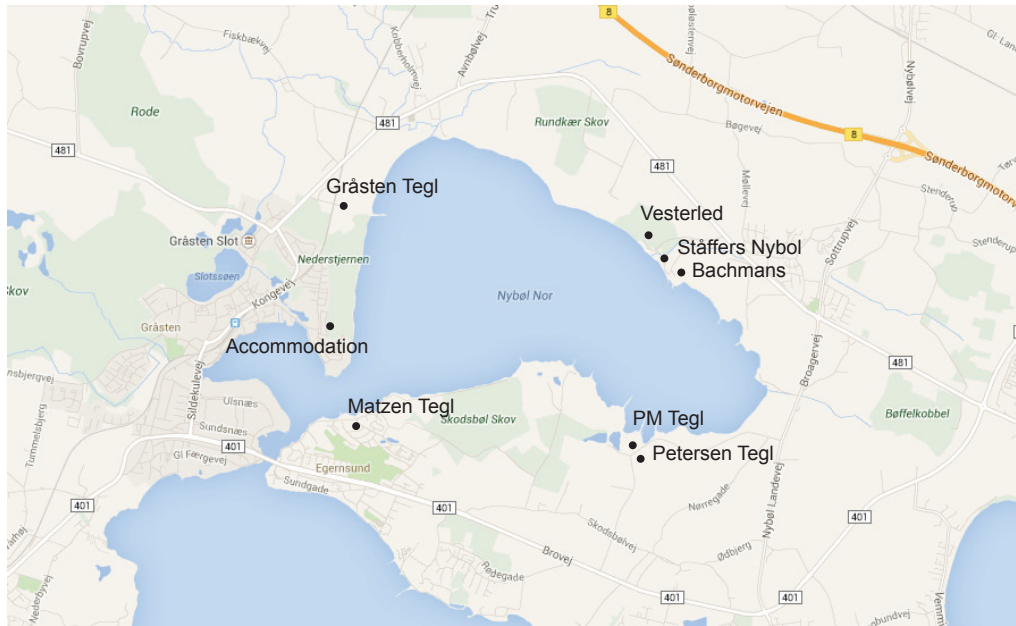


Figure 5. Map showing Brick factories around Nybol Nor and the accommodation during the workshop. Egersund, Denmark 8.-21.9.2013.

From the beginning it was informed for the workshop participants that we would have bicycles as a means of travelling from factory to factory (see Figure 6.). Based on this information, the diary was designed as compactly as possible to carry around during the workshop. During the workshop, I was carrying in my backpack, along with the diary: a video camera, camera, tripod, microphone and recording device. In the workshop, I moved from factory to factory seeking out factory processes that embody certain aesthetic quality or looking for different places that have special feeling or sounds to it.

The means of travelling around Nybol Nor from factory to factory influenced the subjective experience of the whole workshop profoundly. The physicality, the weather and the environment influenced my feelings and the level of energy and motivation during the actual artistic practice directly.



Figure 6. The bicycle as a means of travelling during the workshop and the landscape of the environment. Egersund, Denmark 8.-21.9.2013.

The nature of a particular artistic practice

My practice-led research is focused on materiality, aesthetics and making using artistic practice as a ground for developing and testing the research questions. The artistic practice is directed towards the processes that have aesthetic quality. These particular events are captured with video camera, camera and by recording sounds. In the workshop, the factory environments gave a fruitful ground for exploring these particular processes further (Figure 7.). The artistic practice in this workshop was continuing the ideas of process aesthetics that is based on the previous works in this research context (see Falin 2014). The starting point for exploring the idea of process aesthetics surfaced from the aesthetic elements in ceramic practice e.g. the sounds of crackle when the glaze surface on a ceramic object starts to crack after the firing.

In my research on artistic practice and aesthetics, *the making* is used as a method in order to understand the aesthetic engagement and the aesthetic experiences in artistic practice. The artistic practice is a ground for collecting material out of the subjective process. Targeting a creative practice is difficult because of the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) with the creative process. The flow state is “*a peak experience in which a person gets completely involved in the challenging task at hand to such an extent that he or she may temporarily lose all sense of time and place*” (Seitamaa-Hakkarainen & al. 2012, 6). The concentration when experiencing a flow state is usually protected by the practitioner and the distractions may interrupt the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, 120). This interruption was vividly experienced in the workshop when trying to pause to fill the questionnaires or to write the diary during the creative processes.

The video material, that was the result of my artistic practice in this workshop, captures and conveys the aesthetic experiences better than the diary method designed to draw insights from this topic. The videos are also documentations of the actual moments when I was experiencing aesthetics in particular environments and processes.



Figure 7. Three different still images from videos made in: Ståffers Nybol and Bachmans. 8.-21.9.2013, Egernsund, Denmark.

Background of the practice-led methods

The diary method introduced in this paper is part of my artistic research that concentrates on artistic practice and the influence of aesthetics in the creative process. In my practice-led research, I use my own practice as a ground for exploring and developing the research interests. Through my experiences as a ceramic artist I explore the act of making and how the aesthetics influences the processes and the knowledge production in the creative act. In this paper, the practice-led research is understood as conscious exploration with the knowledge involved in the making process and where the research is closely intertwined with the practice (Nimkulrat 2007, 2). Linda Candy writes about practice-led research saying, “if the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led” (2006). This research acknowledges the practice as a place for understanding the aesthetics through the subjective processes with ceramic materials. In my artistic research, I focus on three different aspects of the creative process: materiality, aesthetics and making.

Mäkelä has introduced a method in practice-led research that she calls “retroactive approach” (Mäkelä 2003, 23; Mäkelä 2011, 73). This method accumulates with the dialogue between art and research and looks back at the process reflecting the accumulated knowledge with the documentations of the prior process. The method relies on comprehensive documentation. Using the diary for documenting the research process is one aspect of it. The diary can be used also in a more focused way of producing research material. In this paper, the diary is examined as a pre-designed method for capturing material out of a situated and time-limited artistic process based on the ideas of the diary being as the documentation of a particular research process.

The diary method was applied in order to focus more on a specific area of artistic practice that concentrates on aesthetic experience. The workshop itself was conducted in a previously unfamiliar environment with the new mediums of brick clay and factory productions. Although having experience in ceramic practice, the brick clay and its processes were new giving good opportunity to explore the meaning of aesthetics and new knowledge in practice. With these circumstances it was impossible to anticipate all the influential factors of the artistic process conducted in the workshop and the diary became very explorative in nature.

Findings

The diary as such, is a flexible method allowing one to use it in a way that supports the researchers individual purposes. Practice-led research, with its relatively short history (Korvenmaa 2006, 8-9), has not been able to identify standard methodology, but in many cases the researchers themselves develop suitable methods for their research interests (Nimkulrat 2009, 50). With its flexibility, the diary seems to be suitable part of the methods used in the practice-led research. Recently researchers in Empirica research group in Aalto University, the School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Department of Design, have been developing the diary as a method for practice-led research and education (e.g. Groth & al. 2014; Kosonen & Mäkelä 2012).

Reflecting on the functionality of the different parts A, B and C of the presented diary method the C part became the most important during the workshop, as it was the easiest to fill in the way that it was designed for. The physical moving around the area, where the brick factories were located, made the filling of the questionnaires, documenting the locations of the experiences with pictures and videos harder than anticipated. Part A and B were designed to be filled out during the meaningful experiences that proved out to be in many cases almost impossible without interrupting the artistic practice entirely by moving into another location where it could be easier to concentrate and give time for answering the questions.

Answering the questionnaire took a long time when reflecting each question at a time. In the end, there are 11 filled questionnaires that were filled in 8 different days during the two-week long workshop. Four of the questionnaires were filled after a particular experience that was meaningful to the artistic practice, the others were filled in the end of the day or another time when having enough time to concentrate on the questions.

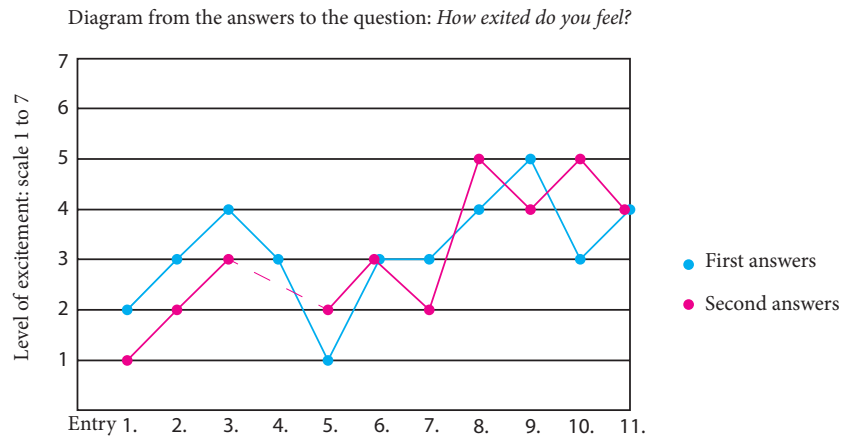


Table 1. Graphic illustration from the answers to the same question in the questionnaire. Blue indicating the first question and red indicating the second answered question.

In the fourth day answering the questionnaire, I noticed that there was one question *How excited do you feel?* (question 3. and 10.) repeated two times. It had gone unnoticed through the designing process and three days of answering the questionnaire in the workshop. In the fourth day, when noticing this, I decided not to answer the question again. After giving this matter some thoughts, I decided to continue to answer the questionnaire as before noticing the error. In the end it turned out that I kept forgetting the repeated question during the answering process and answered it as I had before. In Table 1., the answers of these two same questions are illustrated. It shows that only two times during the workshop in 11 filled questionnaires, the answer to the same question had been the same.

Understanding that the level of excitement can be very difficult to capture in any given situation and looking at the small differences of all the given answers, the result in this case might be normal variability that this scale 1 to 7 can give. This result still troubled me, because I felt that I should have noticed this during the answering process. In my own experience of answering this same question and not noticing it, was because I reflected different aspects of the process with each of the questions. The first time answering the same question (question number 3.) was at the beginning of the whole questionnaire, when I was answering from the current and general atmosphere of that particular time and environment. Many times this moment of answering the questionnaires was in the different locations that the actual targeted practice. Reading the diary reflections and comparing them to the answered questions it was clearer that in the beginning I reflected the time and place of answering the questions and continuing the process of answering the reflection directed to the days most meaningful events. During the second time of answering the same question (question number 10.), my reflections had moved from the current situation towards the events and artistic practice from that day. This had happened many times in different locations and some time before answering the questions.

Repeated questions have been used in making of questionnaires and surveys to check the reliability of the material. The repeated questions target the same issue, but the questions are formulated slightly differently. This is made so that the given data can be confirmed being accurate and the material is therefor reliable. Creating questionnaires and surveys are normally done by researchers to a selected group of people. In this case, I was designing the method for my own use. This makes the validation and checking the reliability of the material different compared with the situation of researcher questioning a research participant. In the case of having some one else answer the given questions, it is possible to come back to the issue e.g. with interviews in

order to confirm the initial results. In this case, I understand the given questions and know the research question of what I am targeting with this line of questioning.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have reflected on a practice-led method that was pre-designed for a two weeklong workshop. The ill-fitted design and the error in the questionnaire brought out the difficulties and the gaps in designing this kind of method. The use of a diary is common in artistic and practice-led research, but little has been documented on how the method has been designed to suite the research purposes. This might result from the fact that the diary has been used mainly in longitudinal processes and not so much in short focused processes.

When targeting the subjective creative process with research methods, the method has to be designed as part of the practice so that the method can be act out without the feeling of disruption. Designing for one self gives good understanding about the subjective preferences and the nature of the practice itself. Combining different recording ways in a compact manner can give more flexibility within different practices to reflect the process while doing it. In this case the time of going around by bicycle would have been fruitful time to reflect the experiences and the practice.

In this case, the art practice itself produced more meaningful material out of the targeted research question than the pre-designed method. Through the videos, I can come closer to the essence of the aesthetic experiences and how they influence the artistic practice than with the help of the designed method. The diary method influenced the artistic practice and the workshop itself by focusing my thoughts on the topic of aesthetic experience in artistic practice. The repeated questions and the daily reflections to the diary kept me tuned with the artistic practice and the research goals during the whole workshop.

There is potential in using the questions or questionnaires as a directive or focusing element when designing methods for subjective use. The strongest influence of the questions was the repeated reflection through the questions towards the artistic process. This directed the focusing to the elements brought out by the questions. The questions had the power of initializing the reflecting process, but the outcomes of the answered questions didn't have much use from the research perspective. The understanding of the aesthetic experience came clearer through this workshop, but it was very hard to analyze through this method alone.

References

- Berleant, A. (1991). *Art and Engagement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Candy, L. (2006). *Practice Based Research: A Guide*. Creative & Cognition Studios, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Dewey, J. (2005). *Art as Experience*. New York: The Penguin Group.
- Falin, P. & Falin, P. (2014). Making and Perceiving - Exploring the Degrees of Engagement with the Aesthetic Process. *Proceedings of the Design Research Society 2014 conference*, Umeå, Sweden, 16-19.6.2014.
- Falin, P. (2014). Connection to materiality: Engaging with Ceramic practice. *Ruukku 2, Materiality in artistic research*, Studies in Artistic Research, Online Publication. <http://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/44836/44837>.
- Fuentes, C. (1995). *Taiteilija Frida Kablo Paljastava omakuva*. [Artist Frida Kahlo: Exposing self-portrate]. Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava.
- Glaze, J. (2002). Ph.D. Study and the use of a Reflective Diary: A Dialogue with self. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 3:2, pp. 153-166.

- Groth, C. & Mäkelä, M. & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, P. & Kosonen, K. (2014). Tactile Augmentation: Reaching for tacit knowledge. *Proceedings of the Design Research Society 2014 conference*, Umeå, Sweden, 16-19.6.2014.
- Iida, M., Shrout, P. E., Laurenceau, J-P. & Bolger, N. (2012). Using Diary Methods in Psychological Research. In: *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology: Vol. 1. Foundations, Planning, Measures and Psychometrics*. Ed. Cooper, H. American Psychological Association.
- Jacelon, C. S. & Imperio, K. (2005). Participant Diaries as a Source of Data in Research With Older Adults. *Qualitative Health Research* 15: 991, pp. 991-997.
- Johns, R. (2010). Likert Items and Scales. *SQB Methods Fact Sheet 1*. University of Strathclyde.
- Korvenmaa, P. (2009). Forewords. In *The Art of Research. Research Practices in Art and Design*. Eds. Mäkelä, M. & Routarinne, S. Helsinki: University of Art and Design Helsinki.
- Kosonen, K. & Mäkelä, M. (2012). Designing Platform for Exploring and Reflecting on Creative Process. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 45, pp. 227-238.
- Lahdensuu, L. (2009). *Leonardo da Vinci, Työpäiväkirjat* [working diaries]. Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Teos.
- Lejeune, P. (2009). *On Diary*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Muukkonen, H., Inkinen, M., Kosonen, K., Hakkarainen, K., Vesikivi, P., Lachmann, H., Karlgren, K. (2009). Research on knowledge practices with the Contextual Activity Sampling System. *Proceedings of the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning 2009 conference*, June 8-13, 2009, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece.
- Mäkelä, M. (2003). *Saveen piirtyviä muistoja. Subjekttiivisen luomisprosessin ja sukupuolen representaatioita*. [Memories on clay: representations of subjective creation process and gender]. Academic dissertation. Helsinki: University of Art and Design Helsinki.
- Mäkelä, M. (2007). Knowing Through Making: The Role of the Artefact in Practice-led research. *Knowledge, Technology, Policy*. 20: 3, pp. 157-163.
- Mäkelä, M. & Latva-Somppi, R. (2011). Crafting narratives: Using historical context as a reflective tool. *Craft Research* 2, pp. 37-59.
- Mäkelä, M. (2011). Framing (a) Practice-led Research Project. In Mäkelä, M. & Routarinne, S. (eds). *The Art of Research: Research Practices in Art and Design*. Helsinki: University of Art and Design Helsinki, pp. 60-84.
- Mäkelä, M. & Nimkulrat, N. (2011). Reflection and documentation in Practice-Led Design Research. In Eds. Koskinen, I.; Härkäsalmi, T.; Mazé, R.; Matthews, B.; Lee, J-J. *Proceedings of the NORDES 4th Nordic Design Research Conference: Making Design Matter*, 29 May – 1 June, Helsinki, Finland.
- Nimkulrat, N. (2007). The Role of documentation in practice-led research. *Journal of Research Practice*, 3(1), Article M6.
- Nimkulrat, N. (2009). *Paperness. Expressive Material in Textile Art from an Artist's Viewpoint*. Academic dissertation. Helsinki: University of Art and Design Helsinki.
- Paperno, I. (2004). What Can Be Done with Diaries. *Russian Review*. Vol. 63 Issue 4, pp. 561-573.
- Pedgley, O. (2007). Capturing and analysing own design activity. *Design studies* Vol 28 No. 5, pp. 463-483.
- Rak, J. (2009). Dialogue with the future: Philippe Lejeune's method and theory of diary. Preface In *On Diary*. Lejeune, P. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 16-29.
- Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, P., Laamanen, T-K., Viitala, J., Mäkelä, M. (2013). Materiality and Emotions in Making. *Techne Series A*, 20(3), pp. 5-19.
- Turpeinen, O. (2005). *Merkityksellinen museoesine: Kriittinen visuaalisuus kulttuurihistoriallisen museon näyttelysuunnittelussa*. [The meaningful museum object: Critical visibility as part of exhibition design in cultural museum]. Academic dissertation. Helsinki: University of Art and Design Helsinki.
- Zimmerman, D. H. and Wieder, L. D. (1977). The Diary: 'Diary-Interview Method'. *Urban life* Vol 5 No. 4, pp. 479-498.