Mediating Authenticity: Performing the Artist in Digital media

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Abstract

This study examines the interplay between identity positions, dominant ideologies, and discursive practices on the Internet. The aim is to study how a culture like the art world is adapting to digital technology. The starting question is: How are artists’ identities created today? To answer this question, I did an ethnographic study of art students at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm (KKH), focusing on their use of the Internet as a means of communication. During a five-month stay as a PhD student at the school I studied how 50 students artist's identity was performed on the Web, and 10 students were interviewed about their views on communication in general.

The study shows a picture where two competing concepts of the artist create uncertainty about how an artist should be: like the romantic concept of the genial artist or like the institutional concept of the artist who is collectively created by the art world’s institutions. This applies to someone who appears as an outsider but in practice is a networker. The ideology expressed isn’t something new, however the discursive practices have changed. The artist is still an oracle that must be explained by others, but when the art world through globalization became more difficult to overview it is not enough to hang at gallery openings, a digital business card in the form of a website makes the curator’s work easy. It must however still look as if someone else does the framing.

The common denominator for the students who used the web more directly to communicate and collaborate was not that they were making “digital art” but that they appeared in various creative fields. Digital media can be seen here as a mean for the individual to more easily move between different art worlds, and thus as a possible means to change.

Keywords: artistic identity, computer-mediated communication, digital art, art education, globalization, visual method
1. Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is widely used in the community as a means to achieve change. To understand how this process can work one area is examined here, the visual arts. The technology has always placed limits on how the work of art is produced and distributed (Alexander 2003). Nowadays, digital media provides artists with an opportunity to communicate their art directly to a wider audience. I am interested in how these opportunities are used and how this interplays with the artist’s identity building.

To understand the use of technology, I have started with a few basic questions about how artists are created and how this is mediated. Questions were answered by an ethnographic study of art students at the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Stockholm (KKH), focusing on their use of the Internet as a mean of communication. During a five-month stay as a teacher at the school I examined how the artist identity of 50 students was performed on the web, and 10 students were interviewed about their views on marketing in general. In the following Chapter 2 I begin by summarizing the theoretical background of the investigation, in Chapter 3 I describe my method. Then I summarize the results of the investigation in Chapter 4, which I analyze in Chapter 5. Finally, I discuss my main conclusions in Chapter 6.

2. Background

As many from Goffman (1959) to Butler (2004) have showed, identity isn’t something stable but rather something designed and created by constant repetitions. By repeating the norm for being an artist you become an artist. According to Foucault (1982) identity is created through language, through the available identity discourses in a certain time and space. The identity is also created in duality, by creating contrast and distance to the other (ibid). Regardless of whether identity is stable or constructed performatively, it is only in terms of practical action that it can be studied (Latour 2005). Media such as newspapers, films, television and now the internet are places where these identity-creating practices are recorded (Hirdman A. 2004b). The fact that the identity is created does however not mean that the individuals are free to change their identity; language and society's norms and rules place limits on what is conceivable and feasible (Foucault 1982, Hirdman Y. 2003a). Although the ability for the individual to create an identity that goes beyond the conventions in this perspective can be seen as rather limiting, there are opportunities for change. They can like Y. Hirdman (2003) suggest come from outside in the form of economic and political changes. They can as Butler (1990) suggests come from within the individual themselves through their ability to undermine the norms by distorting the language and by
distance and independence. According to Bourdieu (2000) the discursive established norms and the economic and political structures interact. The possibility to act is limited by the dominant ideology and discursive practices and the existing political and economic positions, but within these frameworks, by obtaining a sound knowledge of the field, the individual can change her opportunities and also alter the rules of the game (bid).

The identity of the artist has changed radically since the Middle Ages, when the artist was on a par with other craftsmen (Becker 1982, Hauser 1999). Not until the Renaissance in Italy, and accompanying the awakening of capitalism in the Italian trading cities, did artists emerge who adopted something that is similar to the modern artist's identity. Someone who is particularly adept at painting nature (Zolberg 1990). The romantic artist type, an outsider who creates out of their inner self, and whose expression like the oracle only can be interpreted by a few specialists, first showed up during the industrial capitalism of the late 1800's, in relation to Modernism and the development of an independent art market (Bourdieu 2000). The artist as a networker who creates art in relation to a historical and contemporary context, the institutional concept of art, derives from Duchamp in the 1920s and was coined in the 1960s but first broke through in the 1990s (Thornton 2008).

Today sociologists are of the opinion that art is a collective process (Tanner 2003), but this does not diminish the importance of artist identity, on the contrary. Even in predominantly collaborative art contexts like film, an individual artist's identity is important in order to give the art legitimacy (Baumann 2007, Strandvad 2009). A functional art market depends on the impossibility of inflation in the art, that it is an original item that unlike mechanically reproduced items won’t be copied so easily (Thompson 2008, Thornton 2008). The artists identity functions as an art works logotype, a trademark loaded with authenticity (Fine 2003, Regev 2007a, 2007b). If there isn't any artist identity connected with an old work of art, sometimes it happens that an art historian simply invent an artist (Zolberg 1990). Successful artists can be seen as brand managers who sell themselves as products using the idea of the romantic artist (Schroeder 2005, 2010). Although the local art world, (without a clear link to the global auction houses) is according to Stuart Plattner (1998) dictated by the "van Gogh" effect, the notion of the misunderstood genius, whose completely incomprehensible art in present time may to be endowed with huge values in a blurred future. This romantic artist’s discourse acts in parallel with an institutional approach to art. Art world institutions, critics, artists and audiences simply create artists with the aid of the romantic concept of the outsider (Bourdieu 2000, Thornton 2008, Thompson 2008).
Artistic identity is associated with specific opportunities and rights (Bourdieu 1990, Flisbäck 2006). A news photographer has different significance than an art photographer, and an art photographer does not have the same status as an artist working with photography. The fact that Bourdieu looks at art in military terms like field, positions and strategies is obvious when you look at the visual arts field in which major economic, political and cultural values are at play. Current research on the Swedish art world also shows that there is easier to survive if you come from a family with high cultural capital (Praktiske Grunde 2008). Sexuality is also something that is used when constructing artists (Widegren 2008), and gender plays a big role when the artist is made; it is for example easier for a man to have legitimacy as a visual artist than a woman (Singerman 1999, Braden 2009). Class and ethnicity are other factors that play a role in the arts (Levine 1988, DiMaggio 1987, 1990). Bourdieu (2000) considers that the liberal concept of individual freedom and the modernist concept of artistic freedom are interconnected. In this discourse the artist should be free and independent from power and money, free from the bourgeois seriousness, youthful and someone that exceeds the norms. But artistic freedom is paradoxical, the role of the artist is a role in a social structure that is difficult to influence. Whatever you do in order to exceed the standard for how an artist should behave is right, i.e. exceeds the norm. It is easy to criticize Bourdieu's view of the art world as a field in which different subfields and genres is fighting at limited space as being too deterministic. The sociologist Howard Becker (1982) represents a less structuralistic and more agent-centered idea of the field of art, as a network of smaller interconnected art worlds. Becker's rhetoric is less warlike than Bourdieu's, and more optimistic on individual’s opportunities to create their own conditions. He stresses the possibility of creating alternative art worlds when the established ones don’t fit. Becker considers that every art world is a meaning making culture with its own conventions, and way of making art. These conventions create both limits and meaning, but without these boundaries, there is no art (Becker 1982, Alexander 2003).

Art worlds are however not isolated cultures but highly influenced by the changes in the surrounding society (Baumann 2001, DeNora 1991, DiMaggio 1982, Levin 1988, Lopes 2002, Watt 2001). The music business is an example of how external factors such as technological change have created alternative opportunities to work as an artist (Alexander 2003, Ebara 2004). Technological change both involves changing production conditions and changing production methods (Castells 2004). The open source culture on the web is an example of a production method in which collective knowledge creation redefines creativity and public discussion (Kelty 2008). In the case of the visual media, the ability of the technology to make it easy to manipulate,
copy and distribute images has challenged the exclusivity of art and the artist's role (Dahlgren 2005, Paul 2003).

So, how does the interaction between identity, discourse and external factors such as technology change look? Academic articles on mediation, Internet and identity mostly focus on groups of people not previously known in the media. They might be about professional’s communications in the blogosphere, or about how the publicity affects the identity (Nabeth 2009). The construction of professional artists identity took place in the media even before Internet. The global art world is a culture that is practiced largely through the publication of books and articles in newspapers, and not least expressed through art (Bydler 2004). However, research contains very little information about how visual artists actually use the Internet (Clarke 2002, Mäkinen 2007).

An art school is a place where intersecting issues like artist identity, discourse and external factors such as technology arise. Here the artist is legitimatized in relation to different ideas about what an artist is, perceptions that historically have been associated with different production conditions. An art school is also an important gatekeeper in the art world. The global art world is a clear example of what the social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1980, 1992, 1996) calls a global network, or transnational culture, where participant not necessarily meet every day. Hannerz sees globalization as a number of parallel-existing, partly interconnected cultures. Individuals travel more or less smoothly between these cultures, depending on personal characteristics and cultural maintained norms. Hannerz (1996) identifies two types of players, locals and cosmopolitans, where locals are characterized by tightly linked networks (where everyone knows everyone), and cosmopolitans by their networks being loosely linked. Network in this context are direct personal contacts; the importance of class, age and gender is significant as the individual's personal networks is often horizontal rather then hierarchical. The individual simply prefers people who are like him. In this perspective the significance of communication technology has a dual role, partly by making the cosmopolitan’s contact with other cultures possible and thus change and create new cultures (new art worlds in comparison with Becker), partly by facilitating the maintenance of the local culture / network in the globalized world. In this perspective we can compare the global art scene with a local culture that is kept the same by common rules and where ICT simplifies the internal communication. Travel and communication technology does not lead to an automatic change of the community; it can instead be a way to maintain and strengthen the same community (Hannerz 1996).
Torin Monahan’s (2002) ethnographical examination of an art school in Los Angeles shows how the introduction of digital technology encourages questioning and transforms the meaning of art. Paula Uimonen’s (2009) comprehensive study of an art school in Tanzania shows how technology not only has practical importance for getting access to the global art world, but also is symbolic, as a sign of modernity. In Sweden, the Royal Institute of Fine Arts (KKH) is one of the most important gatekeepers to the art world (Ericsson 1988, Praktiske Grunde 2009). Here the emphasis is not on teaching a range of artistic techniques, the majority of students have already spent several years of art studies in preparatory art schools. The focus is more on creating an identity for the artist on the art scene (Praktiske Grunde 2009). KKH is also one of the most conservative institutions (Ericsson 1988, Praktiske Grunde 2009). Therefore it is interesting to see how individuals at this place adapt themselves to the changes in communication technologies.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be seen as something that is embedded in a social context, which exists owing to this context but also changes it (Miller 2000, Horst 2006, Uimonen 2009, Ito et al. 2008). To understand how ICT is used at a place like KKH, and how it is a part of the change of KKH, one must in this perspective look at what Horst (2006) calls "communication ecology", communication in a broad sense through oral speech and real billboards to travel and ICT. Another view is to see media technology as a culture in itself, where the function of the software involved fosters a certain type of behavior (Boellstorff 2008). In this investigation I have chosen to look at the technology as something embedded in the culture at KKH, and in which there are also embedded cultures in the technology that is created in the interplay with the technology.

3. Method

From a methodological point of view Grounded Theory as it is explained by Corbin & Strauss (2008) has influenced me. Instead of doing a deductive theory led study, I have initial been more open to the material, and built my own theory from the ground based on the material. From the collected material concepts and categories have been created. I am of course influenced by different theories why these are clarified. These theories are also important for the interpretation of my results. Sleney et al (2006) recommend the integration of different methods to obtain additional perspectives. Therefore I allowed the results of an investigation of fifty students web mediation to be leading for ten semi-structured interviews. I have chosen an open semi-structured interview form in order to provide the informant with an opportunity to define what is important (Ryen 2004). Here the interview creates new knowledge as a result of social interaction.
(Rönnblom 2002). Bruckman (2002) proposes that you should look at publicly published material on the Internet as intentional and assume that the sender wants to participate in a public discussion, which is why I have chosen not to ask the informants permission to use the material published online. But I have chosen to de-identify the information so that students not should feel they are singled out. Following the ethnographical tradition, I provided the informants with an opportunity to give their own opinions and enter into dialogue with me regarding the results of the investigation (Garcia et al 2009, Corbin & Strauss 2008).

3.1 Web survey of fifty students’ Internet presentations

An Internet search combines much of the information that is publicly accessible for a person operating in Sweden, this also includes some analog media as most of the newspapers are available online. In this study I have started with looking at the representation of fifty art students’ identities in the multimodal environment of Internet in the form of text, images, sound, video, animation and typography on web pages, as well as in social networks. By representation I do not mean a representation of the physical body like an avatar in a game, but identity-representation in a broad sense, i.e. the discursive practice that makes the artist into artist, not least the works of art. The focus has been on the visual and verbal as a whole. I treat technical aspects of the information, whether it is a photo of a painting or an interactive video, as an expression of the discourse and thus a part of the whole. I have investigated whether the students’ name occurs in established art contexts on the web, in articles about art in Swedish newspapers, press releases to news bureaus and information from art institutions like art schools and art galleries. I have also investigated whether the artists’ name occurs in alternative contexts and whether they themselves present themselves as artists. It is important to understand the interactive and social dimensions of social networks like Facebook and Myspace (Doostdar 2004, Murthy 2008), therefore I have created active user identities in these forums, her my own involvement in the Swedish art world has been important in order to identify the students as participants in this art world. I use the concepts Baumann (2007) borrowed from theories about social movements in order to interpret the material. Here the concept pair ideology and discourse is extended with the concept of frame that links discourse to a broader context and indicate a conscious sender as opposed to more unreflected discursive practices. I am also interested in who’s framing and whether the student seems to have control over the information:

- What ideologies about the artist are expressed?
  - Adept: skilled at e.g. paint nature, or at editing video.
  - Romantic: genial outsider who creates from her inner self.
**Networker**: Makes art in a context.
- What discursive practices are used: form, color, technology, place and genre.
- Who frames the art and the artist?
- Has the student control over the information?

After having conducted searches on ten or so of the students, I arrived at a combination of different searches that created the most fine-meshed net. All in all the following sites/search tools provided many hits: Google Search, Facebook, Myspace, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter and Domain Search.

The Royal Institute of Fine Arts accepts about 25 students each year, which are usually about 25 years of age, with slightly more women than men. I chose to examine two groups, first-year and fifth-year students, in order to obtain a variation in age and at the same time an opportunity to compare between students who have just started school and those who have completed 4 years. The study year groups examined consisted of a total of 50 students; 23 first-year students (9 men and 14 women) and 27 fifth-year students (10 men and 17 women).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Number, gender, median age and age distribution of students in study years 1 and 5 at the Royal University College of Fine Arts, Autumn 2009.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Number: 23, Men: 39%, Women: 61%, Median age: 25 years, Distribution: 22-35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Number: 27, Men: 37%, Women: 63%, Median age: 30 years, Distribution: 25-40 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.2 Four ideal types**

The results of the gathering of data in the form of websites on the Internet, could be analyzed in several ways, such as “which different genres of art were represented in the material”, or “on which kind of sites I could find them”. The students represent a heterogeneous group in terms of forms of expression, from surreal paintings to charcoal drawings, performance, sound art and film. But the most striking difference between the various students was not art genre but type of web activity, and this is why I chose this as a starting point for a classification. I first divided up the students into two groups; those whose activities made it clear and easy to find and to define them artistically, and those who were difficult to find and difficult to understand in terms of what kind of art they did. The first group was evident in various ways. Some students were primarily framed by others, in newspaper articles about art exhibitions and the art school’s reports about
who had obtained scholarships or entered some university college, I called this ideal type *Icon*. *Icons* can also frame themselves on self-produced websites but they are then published as if someone else was the sender. Another more active framing is performed by the students themselves, by creating their own website and addressing visitors directly or by posting contributions in discussions on the web, this ideal type I called *Agent*. The other large group of students was unclear in various ways. Some were easy to find but were present primarily as art students, framed as a name of a participant in various art school contexts but without a clear artistic profile, I called this ideal type *Student*. Another group was not far from invisible, but circulated in art contexts in different ways, I called this group *Indefinable*. A few students were completely invisible.

**3.3 Ten interviews**

I carried out at least two semi-structured interviews with students of each ideal type and of these one in each age group; this was to obtain contact with as heterogeneous group as possible. The students received a question to think about in advance:

> If you would explain to someone (younger) what you do to market yourself as an artist, what would you say? [See interview template in Appendix A]

In connection with the 20-40 minutes long tape recorded interviews, which in some cases were supplemented with questions via e-mail, I presented the results of the survey of the students’ web sites so that the informants could be able to arrive at their own interpretations of this material.

**4 Results**

**4.1 The students’ own publishing**

Even though the students are trained to be cultural entrepreneurs with workplaces in relative openness they do not differ in their use of blogs and online communities in purely quantitatively terms compared with Swedes in comparable age groups. Ownerships of personal websites are higher than average, but personal websites among fifth-year students were often a result of a course in web publishing, and the website were sometimes not used after the course which is why the high numbers of personal websites should not be overvalued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1 22-35</th>
<th>Year 5 25-40</th>
<th>Swedes in general</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Table 2** | The number of students that have a website, blog or use the social forums Facebook and Myspace, compared with Swedes of similar age.
### 4.2 Distribution of students of different ideal types

Table 3 Different types of visibility as artist on the Internet when searching of name of student at the Royal Institute of Fine Arts (KKH) autumn 2009 divided by ideal types (see explanation of ideal types in Appendix B).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woman = W</th>
<th>Invisible</th>
<th>Indefinable</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Icons</th>
<th>Agents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man = M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing artistic ideologies</td>
<td>Romantic Networker</td>
<td>Romantic</td>
<td>Adept Romantic Networker</td>
<td>Networker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information check</td>
<td>Yes, not visible</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Yes, partly</td>
<td>Yes, largely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 (23)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WWWM</td>
<td>WM</td>
<td>WWWWWWWMM</td>
<td>WWWWWMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5 (27)</td>
<td>WMM</td>
<td>WWWMM</td>
<td>WWWWWWWMM</td>
<td>WWWWWMM</td>
<td>WWM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the students whose artist identity was unclear the romantic ideology was strong first and foremost because they do not communicate themselves and their art clearly. This group was largest in fifth year. The unclear students that I call *indefinable* also illustrate an institutional concept of art since they move around in several art contexts, for example by being publishers of Flickr photo web pages from art exhibition openings or by having many people in Stockholm’s art world as friends on Facebook. The unclear I call *students* are presented as students and not as artists and only appear in student-related contexts. This can for example take the form of a name on a press release about a student exhibition, or a mention on an art school’s website as a former student. This ideal type occurs almost solely in fifth year. All in all, twice as many were unclear as artists in the fifth year as in the first year.

Of the students whose artist identity was clear it was the group *icons* whose discursive practice contained all the artist ideologies. *Adepts* were not emphasized but could be said to be prominent
in many cases. The material of the artwork was discussed e.g. in reviews or the craftwork elements of the work process. This might be about drawing with charcoal in a certain complicated way or using 16 mm film to get the correct grey scale. This group was largely framed through others, and in the description of the art and the artist first and foremost a romantic view emerged, where artist's individuality and differentness were highlighted and where others framed the art.

“Because she is not on site it is the gallery’s manager [name], who presents [name] and her work of art. [____] He knows she wants to have her art without words, that it shouldn’t be talked to pieces but rather must be allowed to speak for itself.”

While having their own websites signal that they have an eye on things, and are someone that is more of a networker than an outsider, the art and the artist are often presented in third person, as if the sender of the website was someone other than the artist.

[Name] is an artist based in Stockholm, Sweden. He was born in [year]. (student home page)

Stylistically the same graphical language as for a museum of modern art is used. This language is more refined in fifth-year students’ communications. Also the students I call agents show through their graphic language that they belong to the art world, but they write in the first person, using a subjective voice. They don't only use the web to directly market themselves, but also as a tool for the organization of exhibitions and collaborative projects. Agents were twice as many among first-year students than among those who had entered their fifth year.

4.3 Contradictory opinions about the artist in interviews

In the interviews contradictory ideas about the artist often came up. A paradoxical ideology based on a romantic ”childhood faith” in art, which is challenged by the official institutional ideology at KKH and one’s own experiences from the art world.

This is just what I think. [laughs] I think it is very much about contacts and suchlike, and I don’t really like it and so. But I think it is like that.

[Why don’t you like it then?]

I actually think that it should be so that good things find their own path in some way, and that they become picked up and presented and go further as well. But I don’t really believe that it is so. But the fact is that when someone talks with the right people and someone has the right contacts, it is their art that is seen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts about the artist</th>
<th>The artist’s practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The artist as passive object</td>
<td>The artist as active subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not use Facebook</td>
<td>Everyone uses Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lets the art speak</td>
<td>Speaks for the art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>Networker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes big risks</td>
<td>Pays close attention to detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t keep up with marketing</td>
<td>Takes the main responsibility for their PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs no website</td>
<td>Website essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t care about appearance</td>
<td>Makes efforts to stick out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not average/moderate</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The issue concerning appearance was also discussed in the interviews. The view was often that the important contacts were established in informal social contexts where the artist’s appearance and behavior become important. Information technology has in this perspective a secondary role, it functions more like an extended business card. The students were well aware about how an artist should behave but had difficulty in describing the artist in other than negations. Here the identity is not as Foucault (1982) suggests defined in duality with the other, rather the identity of the artist is to be the other: someone who does not use Facebook, who does not keep up with marketing, someone who doesn’t look like all the others; someone who doesn’t manage to dress themselves up, who doesn’t arrive on time, does not have a cycle helmet:

[Answer to question about appearance] Here, I am nearly the only one with a bicycle helmet! But it is perhaps because I am one of the older ones. Sometimes it feels as if people do not see you when you arrive with a bicycle helmet. Maybe a true artist should not be afraid to die. [laughs]

The artist is also made in relation to ethnicity, gender and class. This is how one student with a working class background described her experience of the environment surrounding KKH:

There is definitely a style that the girls have, it is difficult for me to put it into words, it’s bloody annoying, they look very middle class but in a hippy working class kind of way. [hm] That’s how I experience it. And you can see they have money, they are so damn, I think it is damn ridiculous, that they have a… They look so clean and fresh and like that but it is also unbelievably deliberate, but there are certain types of chintz, certain types of jackets, they very much have their own style. What type of label should you wear as an artist, you know. It is little more deliberate than many people think it is. It is definitively a kind of style. I think that many girls adopt an androgynous boy style, they are girls but they adopt a little more masculine style. I don’t know why. And many guys are the opposite, they adopt a little girly style. Artist guys are such bloody wimps. But, I feel the women can be seen more clearly here than men.

5 Analysis

According to Bourdieu (2000) individuals adopt different strategies in the field depending on their habitus. Different variables such as ethnicity, gender and class determine the individual’s possible strategies in the field. This was established in the interviews. The students whose parents
have professional contact with the field, experience "no stress" in creating their own website. There is also an over-representation of children of cultural workers among established Swedish artists, the artist profession is like a guild that is partly inherited (Praktiske Grunde 2008). The students with weaker social anchoring in the field felt a greater need of framing their art themselves, without having a really clear idea to whom this information was addressed. The female students in the interviews particularly felt a need to communicate their artistry on the web; they didn’t to the same high degree as the men trust that this would work out "by itself”. The women’s assumption also concurs well with research that shows that it is easier for a man to obtain legitimacy as a visual artist than for a woman (Becker 1982, Singerman 1999, Braden 2009).

The fact that so many students were unclear as artists, and particularly that so many were unclear in the fifth year does not seem to be due to lack of enterprise but on the contrary it indicate that the students during their training have acquired some of the codes and strategies that exist in the art world. In the global world of fine art it is not important to reach a large audience, but the right audience (Baumann 2007, Thompson 2008, Thornton 2009). Communicating their own art on the Internet to a potential mass audience can be seen as vulgar, the most prestigious art is produced primarily for other cultural workers and an exclusive market (Bourdieu 1993, 2000, Flisbäck 2006).

Both the survey of the students’ web sites and the interviews showed competing ideas about what an artist is. It is mainly the romantic artist type who is depicted in reviews, on websites and in the main part of the students’ description of themselves. This ideology is reproduced more or less deliberately. In practice an institutional ideology about the artists is more evident than what the discursive practices on the internet show, the interviews show that the majority see it as their task to frame their art carefully according to all the rules of art.

5.1 Strategies: Website that makes the artist the object

The students’ experience was that even some very well established artists were difficult to obtain clear information about on the Web. Several of the students testified that teachers and professors don’t see a personal websites as important. However, all the students I spoke with thought that having a website of their own was good. 35% of first-year students and 52% of fifth-year students have more or less developed their own websites and/or blogs. The aesthetics and framing in these pages showed most clearly that they placed themselves within the contemporary artistic field. Especially on the websites of fifth-year students the art was framed as in a superior art gallery, it was stripped down and simple, black and white. There was usually not too much text, but only the
most essential information about the art and the artist written in third person, often with references to fashionable art philosophers. Almost none of the students work with information technology as artistic material in itself, with the opportunities for interactivity and collective action that the technology makes possible. The websites are used as a way to frame the art as art. When the art is shown outside the established institutions like the art gallery or art museum it becomes difficult to claim that what you do is art (Becker 1982, Alexander 2003). This is probably why different visual markers are more important, such as typeface, choice of color, art genre, etc. These visual markers in combination with references to the art world’s gatekeeper’s signal that the artist is in a social and art historical context. The art is simply more traditional and less boundary crossing when the physical limits between fine and mass culture disappear. Today it is relatively easy to edit one’s own film or do a website with audio and animation without an entire production company, but even though the technology in theory gives the individual unlimited opportunities for expression, the structurally organized positions the artist can take in order to be accepted in the art world are limited. A website that is too ”advertisement-like” can in this context do more harm than good.

In the survey of the students’ websites the women in the beginning were seen much more clearly than the men, and more men than women were invisible. But just because the students couldn’t be found under their own name doesn’t mean that they were invisible, two of the male students I initially didn’t not find upon closer inspection showed to be very active under their alter ego. Several students highlighted the former student Sara-Vide Ericsson’s (2010) website as an example of good self-promotion. Here the artist, as part of an otherwise tightly maintained website, lays out images and comments about her own romantic artistic life in art studios and at gallery openings. Ericsson has literally turned artist identity into a product which is demonstrated among other works of art on the website.

Here you can see that the ideology expressed has not changed appreciably but that the discursive practices have changed. The artist is still an oracle that must be explained by others, but when the art world through globalization became more difficult to overview it is not enough to hang at gallery openings, a digital business card in the form of a website makes the curator’s work easy. It must however still look as if someone else does the framing.

5.2 Ways out: Alternative art worlds

A few students did not express the ideology of the romantic artist. These students who I call agents actively communicated their art through digital media, directly addressing visitors on their own blogs or by using social forums to organize collaborations and events. But it was not digital
technology that connected them artistically. The connection was the link to cultures that emphasize non-hierarchical collective processes, like open source, feminist activism or dance and especially that they had experience from different art worlds and worked in several different genres.

It feels like a very difficult way to become a well-known artist who is mentioned in the big media, and regularly as well. So, the odds of being successful are very low. I think that it feels like a sense of security to believe that it is possible to find other ways too. I think it is possible. You don’t have to be big, you can still find your audience.  

[Where have you got your conviction from?]
I think it is much about the [internet] culture that I grew up with. The fact that what I mostly listen to is smaller bands. I don’t think they earn any big money, but they still keep on with their thing.  

It is above all about trying to find your own niche. It is perhaps something the internet has helped with too. Finding others who are doing similar things as yourself. [yeah] And who are interested in the things you do. I do not see it as obvious to reach out to galleries and the classic art world. It [my work] borders onto many other areas, music, text, design, illustration and suchlike too. (Year 5 student)

Anthropological network research indicates that individuals with looser anchoring in several different networks are not fixed in traditional roles to the same extent as individuals with fewer and heavily knitted networks (Hannerz 1980). If there is no place within the established culture there is always the possibility of creating a new one with like-minded people (Becker 1982, Hannerz 1996). Here the technology not only connect different art worlds, but creates new ones with its own distribution system, scenes and audiences worldwide. Thus one can see the technology as something that is embedded in the culture at KKH, but where there are embedded cultures in the technology created in the interplay with the technology.

6. Discussion

What is interesting is how the students handle competing ideologies about how an artist should be. On one hand, they see the Internet as an obvious means to self-access information about an art world that is difficult to overview. They don’t want to take a chance and believe that they don’t need to do anything to market them selves. On the other hand, it is precisely the exclusivity and the inaccessibility that turns art into Art. As artists, they must be accessible but play hard-to-get not to be perceived as ”cheap”. The students’ self-produced websites signal this clearly through their formal language and their economical text. Another way to continue to be a romantic artist object and yet accessible and searchable is to turn the artist identity into an alter ego. The strategy to adopt an alias is however not particular to digital media. To operate under an alias (like Miss Universum or Clyde Angel), or group name (like Group Material, Superflex or WochenKlausur), or a principle (Fluxus or Adbusters), is a recognized strategy in the art world. It can be seen as an
exercise of power or as a play with the world’s need for idols and fetishes. Playing roles and staging events explore and simultaneously create these roles and events. The word performativity often comes up when the students talk about their art or another’s. Here you can see a strategy like Sara-Vide Ericssons (2010), who creates an alter ego, as a way to push the artist myth. Following Butler (1990) this could be seen as a way to undermine the identity by exaggerating it. But the question is whether it is possible to even conceive anything outside the artist’s norm. Probably the norm is just reproduced; to exceed the norm is the norm in the art world. The ideology doesn’t need to have changed just because the discursive practice has changed.

What is it then that is required to break the norm (of the norm-breaking outsider!) of what an artist does? According to Butler (1990) what is required in order to place oneself above the norms of identity that exist in all groups is distance, an ability to be without the endorsement of others in the group. Since this allows for a relaxation of the norms, a renegotiation of what it means to e.g. be an artist is possible. What unites the students who act as Agents is that they work within many artistic disciplines and appear to participate in several different networks. It is quite simple to see that this anchoring in several different cultures gives the individual perspective and space for renegotiation regarding the norm for the group’s identity. A space, which decreases the strength of the dominant ideology, and in the long term, contributes to a renegotiation of the ideology. The role of technology in this context is something that facilitates the individual’s movement between different cultures. Another way to see the students’ anchoring in several art worlds is that it provides them with the opportunity to compare and in this way gain a deeper understanding of the structures. Bourdieu (2000) emphasizes the importance of understanding the field in order to change it.

To sum up the investigation, a picture emerges where two competing concepts of the artist create uncertainty about how an artist should be: like the romantic concept of the genial artist or like the institutional concept of the artist who is collectively created by the art world’s institutions. This applies to someone who appears as an outsider but in practice is a networker. The ideology expressed isn’t something new, however the discursive practices have changed. For an older generation of artists a personal website is for example considered as vulgar, an artist should not do direct marketing to a wider audience. For a younger generation a personal website is something that is considered valuable, but not as a mean to communicate directly to a wider audience but as a traditional artist portfolio whose fastidious content requires a good understanding of contemporary art to be detectable. The most important interpretation and presentation of the art is still made by others.
Digital media however makes contact with alternative art worlds easier as a possible way to change.

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Appendix A Interview Template

1 If you would explain to someone (younger) how to promote oneself as an artist, what would you say? (This question was sent in advanced)

2 Can you name any artists you think is particularly good (or particularly bad) at marketing themselves?

3 How do you market yourself? (If not, how do you think people know about you?)

4 How do you use the Internet and mobile phone in your marketing? (If not, how do you use technology?)

5 The importance of appearance: How does an artist or art student look like?

6 Social class (parents and grand parents occupation and education)

7 Educational background (Any philosophy or art theory?)
Appendix B Ideal types

**Indefinable**

8 of the 50 students in the study were closest to the ideal type *Indefinable*. Here, I couldn’t find enough clues to a clear artistic identity. Many in this group seems to move in the vicinity of the art world, expressed such as a name tag to an image from an opening, or as a dispatcher for a photo gallery posted on the Flickr photo-blog tool. This ideal type is in control of information by not communicating. The interviews showed that these students see the school with its local and global networks as their primary frame. A good contact with this network is more important than making a website.

**Students**

On Internet The ideal type *Students* are represented primarily as students, their art is poorly presented or not at all. The framing were done by institutions like art schools and the information consisted mainly of reports from ongoing school projects or name lists of participants on press releases about exhibitions. They seem to have no proper control over the information. 2 of the First Year students and 9 of the Fifth Year students were of this type.

**Icons**
Icons are students whose work as artists is clearly visible, often communicated through their own websites but most importantly framed by others. Icons are the most common type, 9 in the first year and 8 in the fifth year. The icons have control to a certain extent, but above all the framing comes from art institutions like art journalists or art galleries. The artist is usually presented as a typical romantic artist who lets the artwork speak for itself. Their own web page publishing follows the conventional framing of the art work in contemporary art: minimal textual information, and a tight black and white graphical design.

Agents

Students using media more active I call Agents. They frame their art, not only by displaying artwork on the web, but by using the Internet and cell phone as a direct channel of communication, by organizing events or participate in online discussions. The agents were the least common ideal type, seven in the first year and three in the fifth. This groups attitude towards technology and communication is more playful. They also participate in other areas of artistic production, operating on alternative art scenes, but also in popular culture. They position themselves in their choice of design language in the global art world, but they are not as fastidious with the text and are not afraid to speak in their own cause. Their activity also generates attention in mainstream media, but then they are more often presented as a prankster than analyzed as serious young artists.