Embodied Connective Aesthetics:

A Collaborative Art Project Guided by Mirroring

Margaretha Häggström
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Abstract. Identity formation is a lifelong process, which defines individuals to others and themselves. When humans develop their social self, they depend on other people's views and values, as well as on imitating. Imitating is an indication of social behavior, which includes mirroring. In this qualitative study, the author examined a collaborative art project conducted through art-based and autoethnographic research by three scholars/art teachers, the author included. The study started from a life-world phenomenological perspective and the concepts of lived experience, wonderment and intersubjectivity. In addition, a four resources model of visual literacy was used to analyze the result. The study was implemented in the context of teacher education, and art was regarded as the principal content as well as a didactic tool, accentuating the communicative feature of visual literacy. The result shows the complexity of conducting a collaborative art project, and that the visual expressions was not restricted to artwork but incorporated body language. Mirroring included not only visible signs but also audio signs and signals, and occurred even though the scholars/art teachers were quite immersed in and preoccupied with the art-making. One does not need to visually observe another person when mirroring, but can experience another person's performance by merely being in the moment.

Keywords: Art-based research, autoethnography, collaborative artwork, mirroring, visual literacy

The topic of self is an endlessly intriguing issue that engages not only people in general but also scholars in various fields. Identity formation is a lifelong endeavour. The notion of the other is crucial when constructing the self as a subject; we create meaning in dialogue with each other (Hall, 1997). When developing our social self, as human beings, we depend on others' opinions and judgments; we form our identity in the eye of the other (Aure, 2011) and thus through mirroring (Iacoboni, 2008). By mirroring, we are capable of recognizing the sensitive state of the other and to feel oneness (Piechowski-Jozwiak et al, 2017). When mirroring each other, humans intuitively express and combine emotions of the other and the self. This imitative performance is a profound and strong social behaviour. Tuning our frame of mind is a common way of expressing approval. It is also a way of learning (Yarbrough, 2017).

Mirroring is both an explicit and implicit act, based on visualization and visual communication. Individuals sometimes deliberately copy or imitate a role model, but often people mimic or imitate others unconsciously (Ferrari & Rizzolatti, 2015). Visual communication, like other forms of communication, is a process of transmitting information and messages from one individual to another. Or rather, as Barnlund (2008) points out, individuals simultaneously engage in both sending and receiving messages --- particularly, I would argue, visual messages. As humans, we implicitly send visual information through our appearance, clothing, hairstyle, facial expressions, gestures, movements, etc. Receiving visual information implies an interconnection and a sensitivity to a

familiarity of social information. The ability to perceive such information is connected to an individual's visual literacy ability.

The chapter discusses a collaborative art project conducted through art-based research (ABR) by three scholars/art teachers, the author included, building on the capacity of art to develop emotional connections (Hubard, 2007; Freedberg & Gallese, 2007; Jeffers, 2015). The project explores the way in which the making of mixed portraits is directed or influenced by mirroring. The interconnection --- or inter-subjectivity --- is analysed from a phenomeno-logical perspective, and is presented in an autoethnographic tradition (Anderson, 2006). Phenomenology aims to pay attention to the unremarkable and common experiences, and to create texts that stimulate a sense of wonder in the ordinary (van Manen, 2002). Wonderment, according to Bentz and Rehorick (2008) is described as a "deliberate act of curiosity" (p. 6). In terms of wonderment, the setting in the study referred to in this chapter, is quite extraordinary from the start. The three participating scholars/ art teachers had never worked together as a group before, and specifically, had never created artwork together. It is uncommon amongst artists to create art in cooperation; creating art is usually a rather personal, and often isolated, act. It is particularly uncommon to continue the work of another artist, as is described in this chapter, as a kind of relay race. In this sense, the participating scholars/art teachers approached this art-project with open-ness and curiosity through the powerful lenses of phenomenology. Regarding wonderment as a phenomenon, it invites queries as to *what*: What is really happening, and what do the experiences look like? These questions have guided the researcher throughout the analysis of the project's data.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to expose the lived experience of the process of a collaborative art-project, and how mirroring might guide the art-making. The overarching question is --- What is happening during the art project?

The following sub-questions led the analysis of the results:

- How do the scholars/art teachers move while making the artwork? (e.g. gestures, movements, facial expressions)
- How do the artwork emerge? (similarities and differences)
- How do lived experiences of the collaborative art-project emerge?

THEORETICAL DEPARTURE

This study takes its starting point in a life-world phenomenological perspective, grounded in Husserl (1913/1962), Heidegger (1988), Merleau-Ponty (1995), and Schütz (1999). The concept of lived experience, i.e. the direct feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and corporal awareness of life as we live it, is central. In particular, the study is inspired by Rehorick and Bentz (2008) and their use of the notions of transformative phenomenology and wonder-ment. The reason for using this theoretical framework is the aim to study change through practice. A phenomenological research approach leads to a deepened awareness of the studied phenomenon and is itself a trans-formative process. This process embraces more than just new knowledge:

> It is a mirror, which allows the phenomenologist to see oneself in a new way (…) Phenomenology clears the focus, reflecting a deeper and truer image of who we are (…) it also reflects the life-world behind the image, revealing structures that we had not seen before and pathways to new destinations (p.4).

This claim fits well with the aim of ABR in general and the purpose of this study in particular. As researcher understands the claim,

this theoretical departure has the opportunity to broaden the understanding of visual literacy, which will be considered shortly. First, the chapter provides a brief explanation of the previously mentioned theoretical starting points, followed by the central phenomenological concepts significant for this study.

Transformative phenomenology

Transformative phenomenology offers a way to bridge theory and practice, and to connect workplace experiences with academic concerns and involvement (Bentz & Rehorick, 2008). Using transformative phenomenology allowed for providing examples of how phenomenological research can be carried out, and simultaneously increase the author's understanding of the phenomenological approach and research skills. One of the main purposes of transformative phenomenology is to help scholar-practitioners bring the phenomenological philosophy into practice. It also addresses how investigations transform the researcher; thus, reflections on the effects of the research process on oneself as a participant as well as the research situation are of interest. A broadened hermeneutics, including interpretations of interactions, relationships, and social organizations as texts, is used. This is in keeping with autoethnography, and resonates with this study's collaborative art-project. By exploring phenomenological pathways together with mirroring, the researcher was given --- or rather took --- the opportunity to change and enhance her work, and most profoundly, her way of viewing her work. The phenomenological approach is a study of consciousness. The purpose of applying phenomenology is to generate embodied awareness and understandings of the researcher's direct experience of taking part in a collaborative art project. The deepening of awareness resulting from phenomenological research is itself a process of transformation.

Transformative phenomenology is substantially underpinned by wonderment. Wonderment challenges the natural attitude --- that is, the taking-for-granted-ness --- and makes others see and notice. This means seeing the extra-ordinary in the ordinary. The experience may then reveal the hidden, the imaginative, and the possible. When wonderment is viewed as a phenomenon, the question of *what* is essential. What is happening here? What does the experience look like, and what kind of experience is it? The collaborative art-project is an intersubjective project, progressing through experiencing consciousness and transformation.

Intersubjectivity. While intersubjectivity relates foremost to the psychological relationship between people, it describes a variety of human interactions. It can also be comprehended as a process of psychological energy moving between people. Habermas (1970) used the expression "the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding" (p.320) to describe this process. The process also helps to connect the self with others, through the experience of the world as shared and available to oneself as well as to others. This process is crucial for understanding fellow human beings, and for understanding others' situations and actions, and imagining what one's mental state would be if in the other person's position and circumstances. The discovery of mirror neurons allows for a renewed and extended phenomenological exploration of human access to the emotions, sensations, and desires of others (Lohmar (2006). Intersubjectivity comprises more than direct encounters between individuals; humans are born into an intersubjective world, which includes meaning-making activities and phenomena from the present as well as the past (Schütz, 1999). Consequently, people copy actions, beliefs, and thought patterns. This will have an impact on how individuals interpret new activities and phenomena. Lomar suggests that the phenomenologist ought to take into consideration descriptions of an interior perspective of experiencing consciousness.

Visual literacy. In relation to visual literacy, the researcher applied a redesigned version of the Four Resources Model by Freebody and Luke (1990), wich was later developed by Wallin (2017) and further developed by Häggström (2019). The intention with this redesign is to mark a shift from the linguistic to the pictorial. This model includes and highlights visual elements, in addition to text. According to the model, visual literacy encompasses four abilities based on four

practices: visual code-breaking, visual meaning-making, visual use, and visual analysis. In short, these abilities, which allow you to see and discover visual elements (or other visual media), are characterized by an understanding of what it is that you see when you are visually literate. In this chapter, the author used the model to understand how visual communication between participants in a collaborative art project can be understood. Becoming visually literate entails certain abilities, similar to other language literacy. The Four Resources Model shifts the focus from finding the "right" technique to include a range of practices in order to integrate a broad repertoire of visual practices (Freebody & Luke, 1990). Through this model, four aspects of learning language --- visual or otherwise --- are identified and presented:

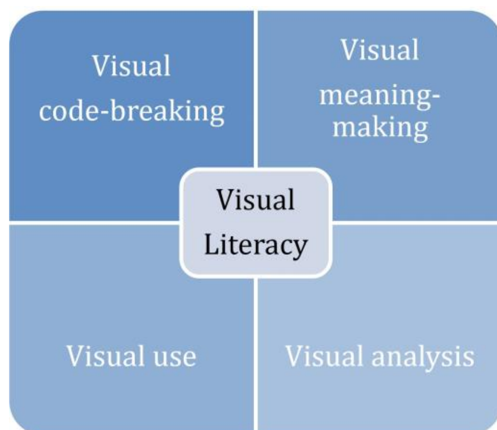

Figure 1. Visual Literacy Model

Visual code-breaking contains an understanding of how visual elements are constructed and operate in different contexts; The ability of code-breaking includes an understanding of the variety of visual elements. Code-breaking entails a basic knowledge of visual elements, for example shape, color, light and shadow, and composition. Visual meaning-making is based on one's personal experience of encountering images, which in turn is based on sociocultural contexts. This meaning-making is constructed through prior understanding of the world, combined with code knowledge; it also entails making sense of images' content. Visual use is based on knowledge of the usage of different images for various purposes. It empowers the individual's creation of visual messages and relies on sociocultural pictorial features. Visual analysis deepens the understanding of visual elements' construction, functions, and impact on the viewer. This enables assessment of images which can reveal underlying messages, intentions, and ideologies. This critical analysis is based on the ability to use image language and the knowledge that such language can be interpreted in various ways.

The researcher did not determine any final categorical criteria for describing visual literacy, which would be simplistic, reductionist, and limiting. Instead, including this model, the researcher attempted to describe essential and valuable components, which can be applied in various sociocultural contexts. To be visually literate, though, one needs to participate in the four practices referenced in the model. These practices are interrelated and mutually dependent on one another, and no single one of them in itself is sufficient for supporting and empowering an individual to use visual elements efficiently and satisfactorily.

As communication through images is the key aspect of visual literacy, the ability to use visual resources to communicate with the surrounding world intentionally is a prerequisite. Mirroring involves visual communication and discovering subtle ways of communicating visually, for example through body language, choice of clothing, etc. As Mitchell (2005) points out, visual communication, as well as visual culture, deals not only with images but also with people's colloquial and instantaneous ways of seeing. Images are multifaceted sociocultural constructs that require literacy abilities and connections with other modes of interpretation (Ionescu, 2014).

Phenomenological perspective on visual literacy. Vision cannot be seen, as it is itself invisible, and humans are not able to visually observe what seeing is (Mitchell, 2005). Still, we are conscious of our seeing --- it is a bodily experience, as Merleau-Ponty (1995) would put it. In addition, it is a relational experience; or, to speak with Husserl (1913), the

experience is intersubjective. This means that all living creatures live in a shared world that includes activities, phenomena, and subjects from the past, present, and future. Images reflect intersubjectivity in various ways, as do our ways of seeing, experiencing, and interpreting them.

Perceiving an image of a face differs from perceiving a face in reality, even if the referent is the same (Ionescu, 2014). The difference lies in the act of perception and the degree to which an individual apprehend this. From this study's point of view, the differences lie in the fact that people can share the life-world in a direct way with a person we meet in reality, whilst one may only share the life-world indirectly with an image. This implies that the intersubjectivity is reciprocal in the former meeting, but not in the latter. This might make the task of the art-project quite complex. The intentionality of a person's actions may shift as she or he create artworks. One's own intentionality can be revealed through reflection, i.e. when a person discover how she or he turn to something (Husserl, 1913), and may discern the relationship between self and the object.

To understand the visual literacy process, the phenomenological concept of horizon (Gadamer, 1997) is used. According to Merleau-Ponty (1995), every lived experience has its horizons directed at the past, present, and future. Each individual experiences things and situations in accordance with their personal horizons of experience. When people observe each other's experiences, they have the possibility to expand our horizon. To understand another person is to link his or her experience with one's own, which results in a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1997). Such fusions may lead to revisions to existing preconceptions and prejudices, and thereby an individual's capability to change his or her thought patterns.

To summarize, the abovementioned phenomenological life-world aspects indicate that visual code-breaking and meaning-making are acts in terms of intersubjectivity and embodiment. When embodied, code-breaking and meaning-making support visual use. Visual analysis depends on an individual's reflections and self-reflexivity, and on an expanding horizon.

METHODOLOGICAL DEPARTURE

This study is a contribution to ABR (e.g., Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2017; Borgdorff, 2018), and is underpinned by analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006). There is a span of researchers within a range of academic disciplines who use art in research in various ways (Leavy, 2015; Greenwood, 2019). These scholars argue that art and science share essential features, such as a similar exertion to explore, discover, clarify, and signify aspects of human life and socialization (Leavy, 2015). Making art is a way of knowing the world and presenting that knowing, Greenwood (2019) argues; and on occasion, the process of *coming to know* takes the form of social enquiry. Art is used to direct social research questions in holistic research approaches, in which theory and practice are entangled. Practice is the core of artistic research (AR), as entails embodied forms of understanding, which at times will be difficult to transform into verbal and written language (Borgdorff, 2018). This study is what Borgdorff calls practice-infused research. This means that 1) understandings sought in the study are embedded in the scholars/art teachers' artworks; 2) the research methods are permeated by the practice work, i.e. the research is conducted in and through artistic practice; and 3) the results consist of actual art-work. ABR distinguishes between researching about self and using self as a tool in the process of researching (Suominen et al., 2017). Whilst the main interest of AR lies in the artistic process, ABR has a wider interest in phenomena within a sociocultural context. The latter is the case, as the researcher is interested in identity formation and how to understand mirroring in the process of such formation. However, the study is close to the aim of AR as well. Still, in this art project, the participating scholars/art teachers regarded themselves as researching instruments. Also, through critical analysis and reflection, lived experiences will become shared experiences. These lived experiences will serve as tools for understanding others and as tools for others to understand. In order to deepen the personal and subjective experiences and thoughts, the

study was combined with the methodology of analytic autoethnography.

Autoethnography offers opportunities for artists and other practitioners to critically scrutinize their work and to reflect on their lived experiences (Pace, 2012). As a research method, it emerged in the social sciences at the end of the twentieth century as a qualitative approach, depending on personal perceptions when describing cultural experiences (Grant & Zeeman, 2012; Rådesjö, 2017). Auto-ethnography refers to “research in which the researcher is 1) a full member in the research group or setting, 2) visible as such a member in published texts, and 3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (Anderson, 2006, p. 373). It is a highly reflective method, which permits the researcher to use and explore personal experiences, to enrich academic under-standings of social activities (Rådesjö, 2017). As such, the method allows for presenting the researcher as an emotional individual (Grant & Zeeman, 2012). Ellis et al. (2011) stress that autoethnographers acknowledge the uncountable ways in which subjective experience might influence the research process, for instance when deciding on why, how, and where to carry out a research project and whom to include. There are various ways of creating auto-ethnography narratives (ibid). The result is presented through chronologically ordered episodes followed by critical reflections, through the theoretical lenses described earlier. This allows for forward motion and reflexive interpretative and explanatory narratives. The intention is to uncover the art project through the process of narrating, integrating visual images, video recordings, and written text. Crucial to a phenomenological approach is the research journey rather than reporting findings, Bentz and Rehorick (2008) claim. The goal, is to build new knowledge, untainted by previous evaluations.

Through video recording, logbook writing, and audio-recorded dialogues along with photographs, the other two participants and the researcher have reflexively explored the lived experiences of the collaborative artwork.

Implementing framework. This study is implemented in the context of teacher education. Art is regarded here as the principal content as well as a didactic tool, accentuating the communicative feature of visual literacy. Through this experimental empirical study the three scholars/art teachers unite foremost as artists, rather than teachers, with the purpose of exposing their lived experiences of a collaborative art project. The process of the art-making was planned in a specific order, although with no directions as to how to compose a portrait image, or how to use the artistic tools and material. Three sheets of paper, 50x70 centimeters, was placed on a table. The art-making was divided into several sequences: first, each made a self-portrait with charcoal; second, we moved in a circle and started drawing on each other’s portraits --- all three drew on all three pictures; third, the circle movement was repeated, now with the use of water-based paints. Later, each of the scholars/art teachers finished the picture she had first started with, through various ways over several weeks. This chapter discusses the sequences they conducted together.

Image 1. Working around the table.

Data production and analysis procedure

This study was conducted in an exploratory way, which elucidated the lived experiences of the scholars/art teachers as artists, in relation to a phenomenological perspective on visual literacy, and to the act of mirroring. In addition to the artworks, this study includes three individual logbooks, including eight paragraphs each from the different artwork phases, three audio-recorded participant conversations (50 minutes), ten video recordings from three different perspectives showing the authentic work (three hours and 25 minutes recorded), and photographs showing the different stages of the artwork.

Following the phenomenological approach, the starting point for writing logbooks was the participants lived experiences of participating in the art project. The leading question for this was: How does it feel to participate? The analysis was then directed by how these experiences were represented in words; i.e. what actions, sensations, feelings, perceptions, thoughts were described and how they were described. The analysis of the video recordings is based on observations, guided by the question: What is happening? I looked at our actions, movements, postures, gestures, glances, etc., and how the participants comforted themselves during the practice. The analysis procedure was inspired by a thematic analysis of narratives, focusing on telling the story that emerged from the study and then structuring it within a theoretical framework (Ellis, 2004). The analysis was carried out in four steps: 1) field notes were taken during the observation of the video recordings, and the logbook was transcribed; 2) code words were identified in the field notes and transcriptions, building on corporal movements, gestures, gazes in the video recordings, and descriptions from the logbooks relating to experiences, emotions, and intersubjectivity; 3) the code words were divided into categories of direct feelings, perceptions, thoughts, corporal movements, and awareness; and 4) the categories were related to wonderment and visual literacy. This procedure is an example of self-reflective hermeneutic analysis (Gadamer, 1997).

The coding procedure was informed by the participants' *utterances, actions*, and *intersubjectivity*, as the keywords. Each of these keywords was linked to the five categories; see Figure 2.

	Utterances	Actions	Intersubjectivity
Feelings	It felt good, I felt a bit low, I felt happy	Movements are fast, Movements are slowing down	Portraits expose same expressions
Perceptions	I realize that…	Looks like X is contem-plating	Realizing that X feels like the portrayed image
Thoughts	I started to think of…	X thinks that the painting is "realistic", and acts differently	X is keeping the trees
Corporal movements	My fingers… As part of my hand, my body	Leaning over the table, Taking a step back	X starts using vigorous movements and the others follow
Awareness	I became aware of… I noticed…. I recognized… I could hear…	X starts painting in different manners to adjust to the image	X comments on the portraits' similarities. X identifies with…

Figure 2: Examples of Coding. Field notes and transcriptions are in Swedish and translated into English by the author.

RESULT: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COLLABORATIVE ARTWORK

The results are presented in three episodes in which the author explore the experiences of creating artwork together. Each episode starts with field notes from video observation and continues with notes from her logbook, and is then illustrated with photographs of the emerging artwork. The episode is then followed by critical reflections, drawing on the theories outlined earlier.

Episode 1: Individual self-portraits using charcoal

The exercise started in quite different manners: One of the participants seemed to have some concerns about taking the first, as if the white paper itself commanded respect. One of the participants was starting slowly and with small hand movements, and with very light pressure, so that the lines was hard to see. The third scholar seemed to sort of attack the paper with sweeping, fast movements, using the whole paper in a direct way. As the three participants let themselves get into the work, everyone seemed to be very concentrated, unaware of each other. However, their bodies seemed to adjust to each other's movements. The two scholars who started off more cautiously imitated the third scholar in a way, and use their arms in a more gesticulating manner, starting to use the entire paper. As shown in the video recordings, no one actually looked up to watch the others; it seems to be an unconscious mirroring, with the bodies copying each other:

> *It felt quite good to start drawing; it was great fun! Even so, after a while I felt a bit low, and I started to think of my age, that I'm getting older, and that time seems to shrink. I mean, it is shrinking; my time here on Earth will end. Nevertheless, I dropped that thought and started to feel the pencil and the charcoal as parts of my hand, my body. It felt really good! The pencil encountering the white paper, my fingers against the paper's surface, rubbing, smearing and making shadows. I kind of disappeared into a world of my own for a while. Then, suddenly, I became aware of the situation and the others. I could hear their pencils, drawing fine lines on their papers.* (from the researcher's logbook notes).

Critical reflection: Corporal awareness

The first episode illustrates an individual perspective on the first phase of this collaborative artwork process. It shows a tentative approach mixed with direct feelings, and both an awareness of the actions around the table and an unawareness of the others' doings. It seems like an emotional activity, emerging in the search for a way to illustrate and express aspects of personal features. It appears to be a self-controlled struggle; on the one hand evoking existential emotions, and on the other arousing familiar, pleasant feelings of joy. The embodied reactions were present.

This episode also illustrates how three individuals started to act as a group; likely perceptually unconsciously, but bodily cognizant. Their imitative movements were not intentional actions but rather actions of harmonization and adjustment --- corporal response and corroboration.

Image 2. Logbook writing after Episode 1.

Episode 2: Drawing on one another's images

After about thirty minutes the participants moved places to continue the work of another's self-portrait. First all stood still, looking at the drawing in front of them. Then all slowly started in a tentative way, and then one started quite deliberately making some radical changes to the image. During this episode, the movements seemed to correlate: when one started to work in detail with the portrait's eye, the others started doing this as well, and when one's movements got a bit vigorous the others seemed to copy this too --- still with no observation of the others. However, they could

hear each other and the movements, and the silence when someone was standing still. The participants could likely notice each other's movements from the corner of our eye, even though no one looked up at each other. One started on the background, and soon the others did this too. After a while, one took her cell phone out and started to draw a bird, looking at an image of a bird on the phone. One of the others started to experiment with some plants she had brought. The three participants are deeply concentrated on the art-making:

> *This was so much fun! When I saw the first portrait in front of me, I felt happy. This image showed a person on the move, a young person who was heading somewhere. I had to capture that feeling, and I started drawing a roller-coaster behind the portrait. I could feel the movement of riding the roller coaster: the wind in my hair, laughter around me, tingling sensations! I could identify with this person and felt her power. It was so weird. But cool. Simultaneously, I recognized that strong feeling of being creative, and that my frame of mind can change and be strengthened at the same time. I tried to incorporate a sense of exhilaration in the picture.* (from the researcher's logbook notes).
>
> *Now, I can see the other two persons in this portrait! Even so, I can easily continue this drawing and make it look like me. It feels easy and good. I try to hold together the connection to trees and natural environments in the picture, and there's a strong existential expression in this picture; a seriousness. I feel humble, and I realize that all humans are so much alike; what it is to be human in this world.* (from the author's logbook notes).

Image 3. Black and white drawings, three in one.

Critical reflection: Bodily mirroring

This episode illustrates how the individuals are now working as a team, albeit with no words or contact. Both their bodily actions and the artwork show conformity, an alliance. The participants have implicitly snatched up each other's movements and adapted to them. However, this is not a case of simply some random similar movements, but rather movements that influence the art-making. The making of the portraits is affected by these movements and the images are starting to look more and more alike, in both the facial details and the settings. While the participants accepted and even welcomed the other participants' changes, they still seemed to try to

take back the essence of the personal self-image.

Episode two also elucidates that the artworks can contribute to the mental state of another person, or rather the image of that person. By observing, and perhaps absorbing, the depicted emotions in the portraits, we seem to not only identify but also recreate the emotions, and according to the logbook notes, even feel the same way. By observing, and perhaps absorbing, the depicted emotions in the portraits, the participants seem to not only identify but also recreate the emotions, and according to the logbook notes, even feel the same way.

Episode 3: Using watercolours

At this point, the participants started to use watercolours on the image one began with. It is obvious that the image changed a great deal during Episode 2. The self-portraits were now portraits of all of three in one. The hair had changed, and the eyes, noses, and mouths became mixed aspects of the three of us. Again, during the art-making, one was more cautious, one started with details, and the third was more physically active. Soon, the participants were moving in similar ways: watercolors were flowing over the papers, backgrounds were filled with similar tonality, and brushes were replaced by sponges and detailed work by sweeping movements, starting from the shoulder rather than the wrist. After a while, the intense drawing changed into a calmer way of working. It seems as if the movements slowed down. All three participants took a step or two back, observed the changes, and pondered for a while before acting again:

> *I started off using the watercolours in an irresolute way, using a broad paintbrush. This is a fast activity, and I don't reflect very much on how to use the different colours. Rather, I think in terms of light and shadow. When I moved to the next painting I had to hesitate a little, because this painting was very light. I had to add more water, to follow the example. Also, I realised that this painting was sort of restricted to a "realistic" colour scheme: the sky was blue, leaves were green, and the sea was blue. I noticed that I became careful, and shifted to using a smaller brush. Then, the last painting was already covered with colours, and it was joyful to splotch and just go for it for a while. I used all sizes of paintbrushes, and some sponges too.* (from the author's logbook notes).

> *It's been an intense process! Stimulating, creative, joyful, challenging, liberating, exciting! The results so far have surprised me, although I had no clear image of how it would turn out. I'm surprised that I experienced the two exercises so differently: the black and white step was sort of making the maximum effort, while the watercolour step slowed me down and made me take account of the previous work done with the portraits. I'm also surprised that the three paintings look alike to such a degree: it represents one same person, yet different: the composition, the approach, and the ways of working.* (from the author's logbook notes).

Image 4. Painted portraits.

Critical reflection: Wonderment, expanding horizons, and change of practice

This last episode demonstrates the different approaches to the drawing versus the painting. While the first episode was the beginning of the process and the start of the art-making, the last episode started when the process had been active for quite a while. When the participants started using colour the portraits were already there – looking back at the scholars, telling them stories, exposing different life-worlds --- which the participants had to relate to and deal with. Drawings can be erased, whereas watercolor is more permanent, which can make one hesitate or think thoroughly before acting. This might be what caused calmer movements during this episode. Yet, the activity itself was also faster than the previous one.

This episode sheds light on *wonderment*, and the fact that this collaborative process gives rise to surprise and amazement. The design of the project challenges the natural attitude as well as the the taking-for-granted-ness. The participants might not be surprised by our own manners and ways of making creative work, but letting themselves work on each other's pictures has certainly been a surprising process. Every time they changed places and encountered the portrait in front of them, they were surprised. The portrait changed as soon as one left it, and one could not control the changes the other participants made. Moreover, the participants had to act on these changes, which meant that they had to assimilate and interact with the new images over and over again. This is shown in the logbook notes above, where the author stated that she had to adjust and be careful and change her way of working. In this way, wonderment is, as Bentz and Rehorick (2008) claim, a "deliberate act of curiosity" (p.6).

The results in relation to visual meaning-making, visual use, and visual analysis

As all of the participating scholars/art teachers are artists and art teachers, I will not examine visual code-breaking here. Instead, I will relate the results to visual meaning-making, visual use, and visual analysis.

As stated earlier, visual meaning-making is based on an individual's personal experience of both creating and looking at images. The three scholars/art teachers used their personal knowledge and pre-understandings when encountering each other's ways of creating images. However, they did not have the time to analyse these approaches on an intentional level during the activity; they had to act on them immediately. That means that they had to analyse while acting, which in turn implies that they examined the content of the image,

simultaneously evaluated both the content and the composition, and at the same time created art. This shows the complexity of this assignment and of the process of meaning-making during this work. Each scholar had to make meaning separately while acting, though they also made meaning together as a group. This was accomplished not through spoken words or intentional directions but visually, which clarifies that the significant aspect of visual literacy is communication through visual expressions. As the results demonstrate, the visual expressions are not restricted to artwork and images but also include body language. The scholars noticed each other's body language and instinctively copied one another's motions. Here, the mirroring was not only based on visible signs but also included audio signs and signals. When they heard the rasping pencil, the rubbing charcoal, or the swiping paintbrush from the other participants' actions, they were affected and became influenced and even inspired. Hence, visual use includes not only visual aspects but more senses, which implies that visual use could in fact be viewed as a multimodal ability. As Ionescu (2014) points out, images are multi-dimension productions, which require literacy abilities that relate to other modes of interpretation.

What kind of guiding questions led this work? Visual meaning-making is based on life experiences and prior knowledge of the world in conjunction with knowledge of how images are composed (Häggström, 2019). This personal-based understanding builds an individual platform, from which the scholars tackled the assignments of this collaborative artwork. Implicitly, they proceeded from questions like: What meaning can I make from this image?; What does the image mean to me?; and How can this image be interpreted? Visual use can empower the individual to visually express her or his meaning, intentions, wishes, dreams, etc. Visual analysis is based on visual awareness of image language and the notion that images can be created and interpreted in various ways, and is led by issues of how images affect viewers, how images are interrelated, and what an image includes or excludes. As mentioned, in this activity the ability to conduct visual analysis was implicitly involved. After the collaboration was finished and the scholars could look at the images, the interconnection was obvious.

Image 5. Work in progress.

DISCUSSION

Through this study, the researcher explored whether this collaborative art-making project was directed or influenced by mirroring. Imitation is an aspect of human social behaviour, and mirroring is regarded as an inherent disposition of expressing oneself, while it still depends on factors such as culture, education, and personality (Yarbrough, 2017). Tuning, both our movements and our frame of mind, is a way to communicate that we like someone or a specific situation. The results of this study show that one does not need to visually observe another person when mirroring, but can experience another person's performance by merely being in the moment.

The study aimed to expose the lived experiences of a collaborative art project, and how mirroring might guide the art-making, which has been done through three auto-ethnographic episodes. To the researcher's surprise, mirroring seemed to occur even though the scholars/art teachers were quite immersed in and preoccupied with the art-making, and no one seemed to paying any attention to the surroundings or the other participants, or their actions. The scholars copied not only each other's postures and movements but also the way they created the portraits, as well as the

content, details, and choice of colors. Following Freedberg and Gallese (2007), who stress that humans respond to art through their bodies, through their senses, the researcher can confirm that this collaborative artwork elicited such bodily reactions. Additionally, these reactions were materialized through the creative process and thereby grew into the images. The implication of this kind of subconscious mirroring is that the aesthetic response to the portraits builds on copying, on several levels, albeit unintentional and unconscious. Mirroring has social as well as practical implications.

Social implications of mirroring

The social implications of mirroring reveal that it is rewarding. When someone imitates you and matches your body postures, she or he demonstrates “good will” towards you. Consequently, when the scholars encountered the artwork in front of them and recognized themselves in the image, or aspects of themselves and their life-worlds as part of the image, they felt good. They also allowed themselves to empathize with the person represented in the artwork. This study can serve as an example of mirroring as a foundation for empathy. This is exemplified in the first episode, when the participants changed places for the first time, and began identifying with the portrait in front of them. They understood each other through the depicted emotions, expressed through colour, shape, temperament and more, and they reacted on them. As the process proceeded, the social orientation increased; for each time they changed places, they interacted more and more with each other, through the creation activity and through the reoccurring meetings with the three artworks. In this sense, mirroring functioned as a way of listening and paying attention to each other, and of responding to each other and the visual expressions. An empathic response to art can be seen in a person’s embodied interaction with the content of a work. As has been shown, this kind of collaborative artwork may prompt imitation-activated emotions and actions, which make possible a willingness to understand and interact, and to genuinely connect with a piece of art.

Practical implications of mirroring

Mirroring is common in dialogue and conversation: both the listener and the speaker smile, nod, and imitate each other, while at the same time establishing connections with each other. The conversation emerges visually through drawing and painting. The practical implications of mirroring are visually noticeable, and are materialized in a durable shape. In the artwork, the scholars captured what the bodies revealed: thoughts, feelings, and moods. While mirroring in conversation may be transient and incidental, mirroring through visual artwork like drawings and paintings can be resilient and be saved as documented testimonies. As indicated, mirroring is a subconscious replication of another individual’s nonverbal gestures, signals, and bodily actions. The intersubjectivity is a prerequisite for both the collaborative work and for the mirroring act. This work is similar to pretend play, which is imagination-driven and allows participants to experiment with the social and emotional roles of life. Moreover, this kind of work lets people interpret the emotions behind the signals, which gives an intuitive sense of the other’s life-worlds. The work resembles roleplay: by interacting and continuing the others’ images, the participants tried to make sense out of what they observed. The interfusion of the portraits into one became a version of all individuals involved including their intermixed ideas and emotions.

Collaborative aesthetic work

This collaborative work has been an intense interaction, even though the mirroring act was unnoticed by all participants, both when enacting the mirroring behaviour and when being mirrored. The collaborative work was intimate and revealing, and depended on the will to open up to one another, and to carefully negotiate and navigate during the work. As the scholars/art teachers had not previously worked together in a similar way they had to build a bond of trust that was sufficiently reassuring, so they could feel comfortable enough to create the artwork together. The procedure of the work phases implied that they subconsciously figuratively placed themselves in the other’s

shoes, and by doing so they could experience the depicted emotions; that is, to connect with each other on an emotional level. Tuning their frames of mind in this way, they expressed their approval through the image as we simultaneously engaged in creating their own signs and messages (Barnlund, 2008). This ability to recognize visual signs and messages in images relates to an individual's visual literacy.

A collaborative art project guided by mirroring, like the one is this chapter, is an example of working with embodied connective aesthetics. One assumption is that this kind of work establishes connections of expressions, which in turn promotes social communication and creates a sense of belonging and rapport. This study sheds light on how mirroring functions as a means to understand the people one is interacting with. Just like pretend play, the creative activity was much more than a "simple" drawing and writing activity "for fun"; it involved forward-thinking strategies, and social communicative skills like negotiating, considering other's perspectives, balancing one's own ideas with the other's, and transferring understandings from one image to another --- in short, being attuned to and in sync with one another.

Knowing how to interact with others is essential to human life, involving knowledge about social conventions as well as how to recognize the state of others and engage in cooperative activities. Collaborative and creative work is one way to enhance such abilities. This could be of interest to teachers, pedagogues, and other educators, in both the visual arts and other areas, such as the fields of philosophy, aesthetics, and the social sciences. The results may be of significance to anyone with an interest in social behaviour, social psychology, and human intersubjectivity and art-making. Specifically, they might be of significance to art teachers and other educators who work with children and adolescents. Allowing young students to work in a similar way as presented in this chapter, including writing logbooks and having discussions, could be a way to let them get to know each other in a different way, connect on a deeper level, and learn from and with each other. Challenging as this was, it might help students to enhance their visual literacy in an embodied way together.

REFERENCES

Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *35*(4), 373-395.

Aure, V. (2011). *Kampen om blikket. En longitudinell studie der formidling av kunst til barn og unge danner utgangspunkt for kunstdidaktiske diskursanalyser*. Doctoral thesis. University of Stockholm.

Barone, T., & Elliot, W. E. (2012). *Arts based research,* Sage Publications.

Borgdorff, H. (2018). Foreword: Reasoning through art. In J. Wilson, *Artists in the University Positioning Artistic Research in Higher Education* (pp. v-xi). Springer.

Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011). Auto-ethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research /Historische Sozialforschung, 12*(1), 273-290.

Ferrari, P.F., & Rizzolatti, G. (eds). (2015). *New frontiers in mirror neurons research*. Oxford University Press.

Freedberg, D., & Gallese, V. (2007). Motion, emotion, and empathy in aesthetic experience. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *11*(5), 197-203.

Freebody, P., & Luke, A. (1990). Literacies programs: Debates and demands in cultural context. *Prospect, 5*(3), 7-16.

Gallé, J., & Lingard, L. (2010). A medical student's perspective of participation in an interprofessional education placement: An autoethnography. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, *24*(6), 722-733.

Greenwood, J. (2019). Art-based research: Weaving magic and meaning. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 13*(1), 1-21.

Hall, S. (1997). *The spectacle of the other.* In S. Hall (ed.)., *Representation – cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 223-276). Sage Publications.

Heidegger, M. (1988). *Being and time*. Blackwell.

Hubard, O. (2007). Complete engagement: Embodied response in art museum education. *Art Education*, *61*(6), 46-52.

Husserl, E. (1913/1962). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology* Collier, Macmillan.

Häggström, M. (2019). Visual genealogy of portraits, self-portraits, and selfies: Same phenomenon, different phase of history. In D. M. Baylen (Ed.), *Dreams and inspirations: The book of selected readings 2019* (pp. 66-83). International Visual Literacy Association.

Iacoboni, M. (2008). *Mirroring people: The science of empathy and how we connect with others.* Picador.

Ionescu, V. (2014). What do you see? The phenomenological model of image analysis: Fiedler, Husserl, Imdahl. *Image [&] Narrative*, *15*(3), 93-110.

Jeffers, C.S. (2009). Within connections: Empathy, mirror neurons, and art education. *Art Education*, *62*(2), 18-23.

Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art. Art-based research practice*. The Guilford Press.

Merley-Ponty, M. (1995). *Kroppens Fenomenologi*. [Phenomenology of perception] Daidalos.

Mitchell, W.J.T. (1996). *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. University of Chicago Press.

Pace, S. (2012). Writing the self into research: Using grounded theory analytic strategies in autoethnography. *TEXT Special Issue: Creativity: Cognitive, Social and Cultural Perspectives,* 1-16.

Piechowski-Jozwiak, B., Boller, F., & Bogousslavsky, J. (2017). Universal connection through art: Role of mirror neurons in art production and reception. *Behavioral Science*, *7*(29), 1-9.

Rehorick, D.A. & Bentz, V.M. (2008). *Transformative phenomenology. Changing ourselves, lifeworlds.* Lexington Books.

Rådesjö, M. (2017). Learning and growing from 'communities of practice': Autoethnographic narrative vignettes of an aspiring educational researcher's experience. *Reflective Practice International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, *19*(1), 68-80.

Schütz, A.(1999). *Den sociala världens fenomenologi* [The Phenomenology of the social world]. Daidalos.

Yarbrough, M. (2017). *The surprising truth about why we tend to imitate others.* https://medium.com/the-mission/the-surprising-truth-about-why-we-tend-to-imitate-others-b15831070cd9

APA citation format (7th edition) for this publication: Häggström, M. (2020). Embodied connective aesthetics: A collaborative art project guided by mirroring. In D. M. Baylen (Ed.), *Crossing boundaries and disciplines: The book of selected readings 2019* (pp. 82-96). International Visual Literacy Association. ISBN: 978-0-945829-13-3