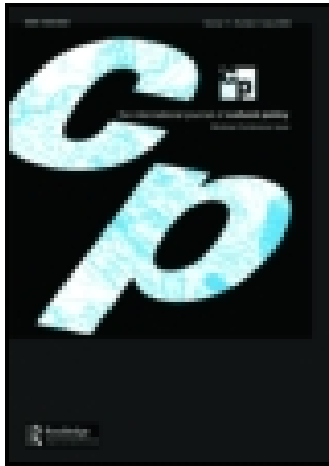


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YOUNG ARTISTS AND THE CHARISMATIC MYTH

Sigrød Røyseng, Per Mangset and Jorunn Spord Borgen

This article focuses on artist identities in contemporary culture. In particular, the authors have studied how young Norwegian artists identify with the term "artist" in general and the charismatic myth of the artist in particular. It is argued that it is fruitful to treat the charismatic myth of the artist as a discourse that must be analysed in relation to specific social and cultural contexts and potentially under continuous reconstruction. The analysis concludes that even if the contexts for artistic work have changed substantially over the last decades, the charismatic myth of the artist still remains a core idea and an important reference point in the construction of the professional identities of young Norwegian artists. At the same time, the charismatic myth of the artist is challenged by contextual changes that eventually result in reinterpretations of the myth's content.

KEYWORDS artist identity; charismatic myth; dedifferentiation; art education

Introduction

The charismatic myth of the artist is crucial to the perception of the artist as an occupational category. Artists are often seen as people with extraordinary talents possessing the ability to create unique and sublime works of art. The charismatic myth demands that artistic work should be carried out in a disinterested manner with a pure aesthetic vision as the only guiding light (Kris & Kurz 1979 [1934]; Menger 1989; Moulin 1992; Bourdieu 1993; Abbing 2002). However, over the last decades, in Norway and elsewhere, there have been substantial changes in the field of artistic production that seem to challenge the charismatic myth of the artist.¹ In particular, there has been increasing interaction between the institutional and independent parts of the field of artistic production and the culture industries. Artistic projects are, more often than only twenty years ago, taking place outside the traditional art institutions. Contexts associated with commercial motives (i.e. the business context in general and the culture industries in particular) have attracted great attention as arenas for artistic work. This process, often called "dedifferentiation" or "deinstitutionalisation", would seem to sully the image of a pure and disinterested art world (Bjørkås 1998; Abbing 2002; Menger 2002; Ellmeier 2003). The borders between a pure art existing for its own sake and its surroundings seem to get blurred.

In this article, we ask if the structural changes described as "dedifferentiation" and "deinstitutionalisation" of the contemporary art world have been accompanied by or resulted in a diminished significance of the charismatic myth of the artist. With the aim of providing answers to this question, we will examine how young artists reflect upon their

occupational identity. In order to analyse how the identity of an artist is constructed, we will make use of empirical material, both in relation to art students and professional artists at the outset of their artistic careers. Our analysis concludes that even if the contexts for artistic work have changed substantially over the last decades, the charismatic myth of the artist still remains a core idea and an important reference point in the construction of the professional identities of young Norwegian artists. However, when they reflect upon their identities as artists, they exhibit a considerable ambivalence in relation to this myth. They both reject and rely on the ideas that are embodied in it. On an analytical level, we assume that it is fruitful to treat the charismatic myth of the artist as a discourse, analysed in relation to specific social and cultural contexts and potentially under continuous reconstruction. By using the concept of “discourse”, we want to underline that the charismatic myth is created and re-created as a part of continuous meaning-making processes.² The content and interpretation of the myth is not necessarily stable over time or identical in different contexts.

The Charismatic Myth of the Artist

To be an artist is, according to the charismatic myth, a question of having an inborn talent or a gift of grace (Kris & Kurz 1979 [1934]). Hence, being an artist is not an acquired status; it is a status for which one is predestined. One does not become an artist as a result of choice or personal will – it is a calling. In the same way, the process of creating works of art is perceived as a fulfilment of divine inspiration or an inner voice. Works of art are unique objects that demonstrate the authenticity and originality of the artist. In addition, the charismatic myth presupposes that the artist is a socially marginal person (e.g. a bohemian). Social isolation is both a prerequisite for and evidence of the originality of the artist. Since artistic skills are primarily seen as being independent of socialisation and training, art education has had a paradoxical position in the field of artistic production (Moulin 1992; Mangset 2004). On the one hand, according to the charismatic myth, the standardised learning programmes that characterise the educational system may damage artistic talent or creative genius. On the other hand, art schools are important arenas in which to be socialised in, concerning the position as an artist. It is also obvious that certain art schools carry great prestige in the field of artistic production.

According to the charismatic myth, artistic work on the one hand must be carried out in a passionate way as a sign of the artist’s true dedication to his or her calling. On the other hand, the artist’s work must appear as disinterested in terms of private interests, not least regarding his or her pecuniary situation. This attitude is apparent in the tautology “art for art’s sake” that has been a central motto in the field of art as long as it has been relatively autonomous.³ No other interests than a pure aesthetic vision should govern the creation of a work of art. Therefore, the field of artistic production has traditionally been characterised by “a denial of the economy” (Bourdieu 1993, Abbing 2002). Bourdieu even claims that displaying commercial interest may result in artistic devaluation. Thus, to prove the genuine character of the artistic work, the artists must deny producing art for monetary ends.

According to Bourdieu (1993), it is important to see the charismatic myth of the artist as an ideology or doxa. The specific image of the artist that this myth produces is one of the underlying presuppositions that are constitutive to the field of artistic production. This also means that the strength of this myth depends on whether the agents of the field believe in the myth or not. Pierre-Michel Menger, another French sociologist of culture, considers the

charismatic myth more or less to be a functional institution; it helps to make the risks and insecurity of artistic life seem bearable to the artists. Thus the charismatic myth contributes to maintaining the artists' belief in a kind of "magic and supernatural power that can control insecurity" (Menger 1989, p. 122).

In this article, the charismatic myth of the artist is treated as a discourse. While it is constitutive for the understanding of artistic work, it is not a given, but rather a socially constructed myth that may be both reproduced and changed.

"Every Human Being is an Artist"?⁴

We know that the artistic population in Norway has grown considerably during the last decades, although available statistics concerning this are somewhat inconsistent and insufficient. The number of members of the artist unions, however, rose considerably during the 1980s and 1990s (Elstad & Pedersen 1996).⁵ In addition, the number of newly established firms registered in the category "cultural service" – with "self-employed artists" as the dominant subcategory – has increased more than in any other trade recently (Bolkesjø 2003). The number of students who have completed a formal education in the arts (at colleges both in Norway or abroad) has also risen considerably during the last decades (Mangset 2004).⁶

However, talking about "the number of artists" is problematic in several ways. On the one hand, it is almost impossible to identify formal criteria to distinguish between artists and non-artists (Mangset 1995). As the charismatic myth of the artist indicates, the field of artistic production stresses individual characteristics that are hard to convert into operative measures. To be employed as an artist (e.g. as an actor at a theatre) is no guarantee of being recognised as an artist. It is only through the quality of the artistic work produced that a person may be merited as an artist. On the other hand, as the boundaries between art and other forms of culture become blurred due to the dedifferentiation of culture (Lash 1990; Bjørkås 1998) and the broader process of "aestheticisation of everyday life" (Featherstone 1991; McRobbie 1999), the relevance and adequacy of talking of artists as a specific occupational group at all may be questioned. If artists have important characteristics in common with designers, stylists, advertisers, DJs and so on, why not include them in an overall category of "cultural workers" or "cultural entrepreneurs" (Ellmeier 2003)? Ironically, the rise and growth of creative industries as the ultimate stage of "post-fordist" production may, in the end, be interpreted as the realisation of Joseph Beuys' vision of every human being fulfilling its creative potential (Duve 1999).

In this article, we maintain that artists *can* be considered as a specific occupational category, although we are fully aware of the problem of defining that category. We analyse the way in which young Norwegian artists, representing well-established artist categories such as visual artists, musicians and actors, reflect upon being artists, and how these reflections can be interpreted in relation to the charismatic myth of the artist.

Empirical Basis

The analysis in this article is based primarily on qualitative interviews conducted with young Norwegian artists. The artists were interviewed in two phases. In the first phase 33 young students from the National Academy of Music, the National Academy of Dramatic Art and the National Academy of Fine Art were interviewed; some of them also took art education abroad. These interviews were performed in 1998 and 1999 (Mangset 2002, 2004). In the

second phase, 12 of these students were interviewed on a second occasion after having completed their education, when they were in the process of establishing careers as professional artists. These interviews were carried out between 2002 and 2004. Both the samples have an equal share of actors, musicians and visual artists, and of men and women. The artists interviewed during the second phase are engaged in various fields of artistic endeavour: some of them are engaged for shorter or longer periods at art institutions such as theatres and orchestras; others are self-employed with their own artistic work; some work as teachers in various kinds of combinations with their own artistic work; while others are employed in the culture industry (advertising, film and music). In the first phase of the project we also collected and analysed comparative survey data regarding art students and other categories of students in Norway (2000). We also analysed available statistics regarding Norwegian art students in Norway and abroad. In the comparative survey, roughly 2,500 students at Norwegian university colleges, studying various types of "professional study programmes" (in order to become nurses, engineers, librarians, social workers, teachers, journalists, municipal civil servants and artists) were interviewed. A little more than 130 of them were art students (i.e. visual art, craft, theatre, dance or opera). This survey was performed by Oslo University College (Stud-Data) in cooperation with Jorunn Spord Borgen and Per Mangset. Statistics concerning Norwegian students abroad were made available to us by the State Educational Loan Fund.

Even though interview guides containing a list of preformulated questions were used in the qualitative interviews, these were not very structured. Although the interviews at times resembled "normal" conversations, the interview represented, of course, a special situation for the informants. The interviews focused exclusively on the informants' reflections concerning what it means to be an artist. Hence, the interviews must be interpreted as a part of an ongoing process of constructing the artists' identities. The following quotes from the interviews are of course translated into English. However, although we have tried to translate as precisely as possible, some of the meaning may inevitably be lost or changed through the translation process.

In the following, we begin by summing up the main findings from the first phase of the project (Mangset 2003, 2004) concerning the question of the significance of the charismatic myth of the artist in the construction of identities among art students. In the next section, we pose the same question, but shift the focus to how the artists reflect upon their artistic identity at the beginning of their professional careers. Our analysis is conducted in more detail as we turn to the second phase interviews. In order to structure this part of the analysis, we have divided it into three parts: the young artists' interaction with the trivial aspects of professional artistic work; the strategies chosen to establish professional career as artists; and motivational factors related to their artistic work.

Art Students and Artist Identities

In our studies of Norwegian art students in the late 1990s (the first phase of our project), we found that artistic identity was manifold. The "charismatic artist" was not the only reference point in the art students' reflections on the artistic profession; "the post-modern artist", "the cultural entrepreneur" and "the artist entertainer" (Abbing 2002, Ellmeier 2003) were also represented as relevant identities in the qualitative empirical material. However, the traditional "charismatic artist" was still surprisingly present in the minds of young Norwegian art students in 1998–99 – irrespective of art field.

A significant common feature in the qualitative material concerns the informants' early certainty regarding their choice of artist as their future occupation. To become a professional artist was a lifelong dream come true for many art students (Mangset 2003, 2004). Already in early childhood it seems they often knew that they wanted to become actors, musicians or visual artists: "I have been drawing since I was two years old," said one visual art student. Another (a future sculptor) said that when he was in primary school, in contrast to all the other pupils, he absolutely "*had to make a bust*" (instead of using the clay for less artistic purposes). One dramatic art student remarked that when she was seven or eight years old she refused to do her maths homework; she did not need to learn any more mathematics because she was going to become an actor anyway. She also remarked that: "In a way, I had it in me all the time, to become an actor." Another dramatic arts student said that: "I have always been walking around with a dream of becoming an actor." Many music students said that they started practicing at a very early age, some as early as two and a half years old. Several art students also tended to re-interpret quite trivial creative episodes in their early childhood as signs of an irresistible emerging talent.

The quantitative survey showed that this early certainty concerning professional choice is unique to art students. The art students (and students of architecture),⁷ more often than other categories of students, thought that "they had known already since early childhood" that they were going to choose this kind of study programme (art studies) (Mangset 2004, pp. 93–95).⁸ More art students than other categories of students also said that "they had known for years" that they wanted to follow this kind of study programme: 75% of the dramatic art students (actors) and 66% of the visual art students agreed that this statement corresponded "very well" or "well" with their opinions on the matter; this compares to only 37% of the total sample (Table 1). Consequently, completion of an art education may be considered the final stage in a long preparatory journey towards a professional career as an artist.

Many of the students appear to regard their artistic talent, to a degree, as a "gift of grace". Some described their artistic mission in almost sacred metaphors: "Yes, it is a calling. ... I don't feel that someone is up in heaven calling on me; but it's an [inner] drive almost like a flame," said one visual art student. A violin student described her ability to play as a "gift", and said that she was "in another world" when she played. The art students in our study, however, more often experienced an "inner drive" rather than a "divine calling". They often talked about an "inner drive", an "inner necessity" or an "almost physical need" to be on the stage, to perform, to play an instrument, etc.

However, a strong inner drive may also be interpreted as a result of "fate". If one experiences a very strong inner drive, is it perhaps because one was predestined to become an artist? Some art students in our qualitative empirical material would reject such an interpretation: Their choice of an art education and an artistic career was often quite accidental, they reported. Some had just stumbled upon an artistic career by chance. However, in the long run, the chance happening proved to be an act of fate. Many art students in our material had gradually realised that they were more or less predestined for such a career. Even though the choice of an artistic career initially appeared to be accidental, the inner drive and existential satisfaction that one experienced later on proved that one was predestined for such a career.

The art students in our quantitative survey also seemed to be more dedicated to their studies than other categories of students. This strong dedication may be interpreted as a reflection of the charismatic myth. Art students, more often than other students, claimed that they were confident they had chosen the right study programme. They more often

TABLE 1

"I have known for years that this is the kind of study programme that I want to follow", according to various "student categories" (percentages).

	Teacher	Social/ health	Journalist	Engineer	Librarian	Municipal economist	Architect	Dramatic art	Visual art	Total
Corresponds well/very well	34	36	57	38	25	17	54	75	66	37
Corresponds less well	39	33	26	37	30	40	35	18	26	35
Does not correspond at all	27	31	17	25	45	43	11	7	8	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	(717)	(876)	(103)	(313)	(69)	(149)	(54)	(28)	(103)	(2,412)

stated that they could not have chosen any other field of study, and seldom said that they would have preferred a shorter study programme. They were also more willing than others to prioritise their studies over other aspects of their lives (Mangset 2004, pp. 126–128). Consequently, these young art students also expected to spend much more time studying than the other students: 78% of the dramatic art students, 64% of the architect students and 54% of the visual art students expected to spend at least 41 hours a week on their studies. Only 16% of the total sample did likewise (Table 2).

There was little support in the 1998–99 interview material for the hypothesis that young artists/art students wanted to live like marginal bohemians. Even though they all (especially the visual art students) valued individual freedom highly, they were also quite attracted by the charms of *petit-bourgeois* life: Many art students seemed to prefer “a safe and good family life” to the independent life of the bohemian.

In addition, the young art students displayed a great ambivalence towards the economic aspects of their future occupation. The denial of the economy was not unambiguously expressed: Many of the young art students were prepared to cross the boundary between art and commerce and had already done so in connection with part-time jobs. For some (especially visual artists), this crossing of boundaries was only superficial: They considered “commercialisation” to be part of an intentional artistic strategy (as in “concept art”). Others (often actors) took jobs with low artistic status (e.g. in advertising) for more obvious financial reasons. However, all the students in our empirical material had certain “ascetic” opinions concerning this. They were not willing to be involved in purely commercial activities without having some artistic reservations. In other words, there was a limit the extent they would “prostitute” themselves.

The general conclusion must be that the charismatic myth was still relatively influential among young art students in Norway towards the end of the 1990s. Some of the components of the myth, however, have been re-interpreted in relation to contextual changes, such as the blurring of the boundaries between art and commerce. How do young artists experience the situation as their dream is realised – that is, after they have completed their education and begun to establish themselves as professional artists? How do the educational programmes prepare them for life as professional artists? This is what we attempted to clarify in the second phase of our research.

There is More to Life than Art, Even for Artists

Although the structure and content of the educational programmes at the National Academy of Music, the National Academy of Dramatic Art and the National Academy of Fine Art differ considerably from each other (Mangset 2004), and the arenas of professional artistic work within the various art forms differ considerably, one finds striking similarities in the experiences that the young artists report in connection with the transition from student to professional musician, actor or artist. It seemed particularly surprising to many of the informants we interviewed in the second phase that life as an artist did not revolve solely around getting into the spirit of the creative artistic process. Work as an artist also has its trivial aspects. The young artists experienced a feeling of inadequacy when confronted with the non-artistic aspects of their work. Generally, the young artists were fully satisfied with the artistic components of their education. However, most of them, particularly the self-employed artists, did not feel sufficiently prepared for the practical and administrative tasks they encountered. When they completed their education and

TABLE 2
 "How many hours do you expect to spend on your studies each week?" according to the various "student categories" (percentages).

	Teacher	Social/ health	Journalist	Engineer	Librarian	Municipal economist	Architect	Dramatic art	Visual art	Total
0–10 hours	9	9	1	7	10	10	0	11	3	8
11–40 hours	81	80	89	66	86	83	36	11	43	76
41+ hours	10	11	10	28	4	6	64	78	54	16
Total	100	100	100	101	100	99	100	100	100	100
N	(711)	(868)	(102)	(323)	(73)	(144)	(53)	(27)	(99)	(2,400)

began to work, they knew little about marketing, writing applications, keeping accounts, and so on.

Many of the informants in the second phase of the study remember that as students they had an illusion that life as an artist would be totally enchanted. As students, they cultivated an identity as charismatic artists. As they entered the professional arenas for artistic work they found themselves a bit surprised by the routine approaches and standardised procedures that characterise some segments of the field of artistic production (especially in institutions such as theatres and orchestras). They were also surprised to meet colleagues who did not focus on being artists day and night, but drew a line between work and leisure. While some of them found this a bit disappointing, others, like the male actor below, described it as a relief:

When you go to the drama school everybody is busy trying to really live it [the artistic life], and art is like a life style; and if you want to be good, it's almost like you have to have a tragic life-story, become an alcoholic or something like that in order to be a good actor. You live the myth in a way. And then it is very nice to get a job and realise that it's only a job. ... If we worked with a serious play at the drama school, then we were serious all day long, but here [at the theatre] actors playing in a Shakespearian tragedy may tell a joke two minutes before they leave the canteen. ... You think it's more artist-like outside school, but when you get out, it isn't. They talk about football in the lunch break!

These experiences are supported by interviews with young artists and representatives from arts' institutions in a study of establishment grants (Borgen 2002). The study concludes that colleges of the arts in Norway to a great extent neglect the need for administrative competence. The educational programmes are, more or less, exclusively focused on individual identity construction related to artistic work. The focus on the individual artist falls short with respect to the networking competence that is required to establish a professional career as an artist. As Borgen's findings indicate, the discrepancy between the educational programmes and the young artists' experiences when launching a professional career is not solely a question of what kind of practical competence they have acquired; it is also a question of attitudes and work ethics (i.e. the artist identities).

Although many young artists find that the procedures and attitudes in some of the working arenas contrast with their charismatic expectations, it is not an unambiguous experience. In spite of everything, most of them do not stop believing in the magical aspects of "life as an artist". It is rather a question of adjusting their expectations. Life as a professional artist has both its mundane and magical aspects. It is not realistic to expect the magic to be present continuously. The exhilaration they may sometimes feel while working as artists is something to be cherished. It is something they should be content to experience only occasionally. One female actor told us how she regarded the magical aspects of her work as religious:

There are moments at the theatre when it's like magic. Where you ... Things happen that can't be explained by how I paused exactly at that point in the text and so on. ... Sometimes there is a kind of magic that can't be explained by our techniques. And it is, maybe we are some strange human beings that we, no ... It is extremely difficult to talk about these things, because we don't have words for it. It is a kind of religion. You can almost speak of religiousness. My relation to what we are talking about now is quite religious. If you manage to open up to this magic, it's just like, oh damn, a painter or, who only tries to lay his intellect

aside and just follows the intuition, something spiritual. But it takes a lot of courage to open up and trust it and to use it.

This way of describing the feeling of magic resembles the emphasis laid on divine inspiration by the charismatic myth. As the informant points out, the magical aspect of artistic work cannot be planned or controlled. So, although the young artists have to reinterpret their ideas concerning artistic work as they enter different arenas for professional artistic work, they do not totally abandon their charismatic expectations. The mundane and magical aspects of life as an artist are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but seem to represent an ambivalence that they tackle in different ways.

There's Only One Route to Success – Hard Work

The field of artistic production is characterised by a surplus of recruits (Becker 1982; Menger 1989). There are far more recruits aspiring to an artistic career than can be absorbed into available positions in the field. How do the young artists deal with this? What kind of strategies do they employ to establish professional careers? When asked what they considered to be the most important condition for artistic success, most of the young artists stressed the importance of initiative and hard work. However, this corresponds badly with the charismatic myth. As Bourdieu (1993, p. 130) maintains:

Nothing could be further, for example, from the charismatic vision of the writer's "mission" than the image proposed by the successful writer previously cited: "Writing is a job like any other. Talent and imagination are not enough. Above all, discipline is required. It's better to force oneself to write two pages a day than ten pages once a week. There is one essential condition for this: one has to be in shape, just as a sportsman has to be in shape to run a hundred metres or to play a football match."

In the second phase, most informants found it problematic to consider artistic success as dependent upon being chosen or having an inborn talent. The belief in a gift of grace (which was relatively strong in the first phase) seemed anachronistic and difficult to defend in a contemporary professional arts world.⁹ Many young artists therefore agreed with Joseph Beuys' democratic view that the creative potential is universal. For example, one of the musicians we interviewed put it this way:

My view of the human being is that everyone can become an artist, but ... You've got to have initiative and be able to do something with your life. That's the most important thing. You cannot live a ... you have to do something with your life, at least once in a while, to get things done. That doesn't mean you have to live a straight life. But you have to take initiative to be able to produce something.

In this way, the young artists, in contrast to the charismatic myth of the artist seem to consider being an artist as an acquired status. However, while the young artists realise the importance of hard work, they also look for signs that will confirm that they are among those who will eventually succeed. One of the visual artists interviewed in the first phase of the project (Mangset 2004) admitted that most of the students at the Academy of Fine Art will not have become professional artists some years after they have completed their studies. However, she took comfort in the following observation:

I know something perhaps about the last four, five, six years, when I've had a lot of contact with other people who have studied here, and I see that it is the people who all the time have had the highest ambitions, who stay [in the artistic profession], and I find this a huge comfort, knowing that it is the people who want it the most, who in spite of everything [succeed] – that it's possible after all.

According to this informant, it is only the most dedicated that succeed in the long run. Consequently, the emphasis on ambition, initiative and hard work, as the key to artistic success, may be interpreted as being parallel to the Calvinists' theology of predestination. According to this theology, the Calvinists had no way of knowing whether they were among the chosen, or among those damned to perdition. The German sociologist Max Weber viewed the Protestant ethic as being one of the principal engines behind the development of capitalism; the Calvinists, who had no way of knowing their own destiny, dedicated themselves fully to their work, clinging to the hope that success in this sphere would mean that they were among those chosen by God (Weber 1991 [1904–1905]). The young artists also find themselves in a situation where it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to know whether their ambition to become professional artists will be fulfilled. Therefore, one is tempted to interpret their emphasis on hard work as a method of dealing with the uncertain situation a surplus of recruits produces, or as a way of generating signs of being one of the chosen (i.e. signs of charisma) (cf. Menger 1989). As individual freedom becomes more of a prominent feature of contemporary society (cf. e.g. Beck *et al.* 1994), hard work may also emerge as a more legitimate way of interpreting success in the artistic arena. In this way, the emphasis on hard work may be seen as a re-interpretation of the charismatic myth of the artist precipitated by contextual change.

To Be in the Right Place at the Right Time

The young artists find themselves in a labour market characterised by keen competition.¹⁰ Although the young artists stress the importance of hard work in succeeding as professional artists, they must also act strategically in order to attract the attention of potential employers. However, strategic behaviour in order to pursue private interests is contradictory to the demand for a disinterested attitude associated with the charismatic myth of the artist. What do young artists do to make themselves attractive to future employers? What strategies do they choose to establish rewarding contacts?

It is striking fact that none of the young artists talk about systematic strategic efforts to establish useful networks. Although they acknowledge the need for contacts, and many of them have already established invaluable networks, they find it best to keep within narrow limits in their efforts to make themselves visible to potential employers or financial sources. Instead, they try to avoid appearing too eager. One visual artist told us how his career got a flying start:

So I made contact with an art dealer in New York, actually, and he invited me to an exhibition. And it was all totally accidental. I wasn't actively searching for an art dealer over there. It was just a coincidence that we bumped into each other. [Interviewer: What kind of coincidence was it?] No, I was in a gallery. I was on a trip to New York to look at some art. And then the art dealer came up to me and we started talking and he was excited about me coming from Scandinavia. And then he asked me if I was an artist, and I replied, "Yes," and then he said: "Why don't you take along some of your pieces? I'm very interested in Scandinavian art." So

I did, and that was that. But I think he became interested in me because I wasn't too pushy. In one way it's a simple mechanism. It's very much based on human relations and quite simple things. You know if you just stay cool and laidback, I think that's an advantage in the art world.

This story may be interpreted as a classical example of how unique talents within the field of artistic production should be discovered by persons who are considered to possess significant artistic competence. The artistic talents should not be forced to advertise themselves. One might even provoke a negative reaction by appearing too eager. According to Abbing (2002), this mechanism may be interpreted as a function of the art world being permeated by a "gift economy" rather than a "market economy". Even though economic transactions are as common in the field of artistic production as elsewhere, these transactions should not be carried out in the same manner as in other markets. In gift economies, self-interest should not be made explicit. When an art dealer is dealing with an artist, he must be given an opportunity to appear generous. The concept of the gift economy, and the norm that talent should be "discovered", may be said to underpin the charismatic myth of the artist. True art should not require marketing – it simply surfaces. This may also be interpreted in relation to the emphasis young artists place on hard work. The most accepted way of manifesting one's artistic talent is through hard work. If one wants to be discovered, one should let his or her art speak for itself.

As mentioned above, the art students differed considerably from other categories of students, such as student teachers, nurses, librarians and journalists, concerning their motivation and dedication to their studies (Mangset 2004). We have seen earlier (in the first phase) that students of the arts were more certain that their choice of education was the right one and were more willing to work/study long hours than other student categories. Yet what is it the young budding artists find so motivating about the occupation? In the next two sections, we will attempt to throw some light on some of the motivational factors that were mentioned in the second phase interviews.

"It's All 'Bout the Money?"¹¹

The deinstitutionalisation of the art world, and the blurring of boundaries between art and commerce, inevitably leads to the question: Have the aspects of disinterestedness and pure motivation, which are associated with the charismatic myth, been weakened? What is the status of the traditional norm concerning the "denial of the economy" among those who have left art schools and entered the professional art world?

The denial of financial motives seems to be a norm the informants are very aware of when they reflect upon issues such as the kind of jobs they can do and which objectives they relate to these jobs. Moreover, all the informants have definite ideas concerning where the boundary is drawn between the purer and more commercial branches of the artistic field. For some the question of working in commercial environments may have pragmatic aspects; for instance, it may reduce their "attractiveness" in the non-commercial parts of the artistic field; while others may have more fundamental objections regarding such jobs. Yet there are also those who are willing to stretch the limits of what they find acceptable. One male actor told us he was willing to take jobs that a lot of his colleagues find illegitimate, in order to earn extra money:

I also want to earn some money you might say! I want to be well off! But then perhaps I have made the wrong occupation choice. ... Or to put it another way, I'm not against working in

the advertising business. There's a lot of actors who are against working in advertising and other things, and it's a bit of a taboo in these circles. The theatre salary is so small that it is almost normal too ... it is almost like you *should* take on extra jobs. It's about NOK 220,000^[12] a year. So if I have the opportunity to earn some extra money, without totally prostituting myself ... You have to be a bit careful of what you do in advertising though, because you get associated with it [the advertisement]. ... It is very embarrassing to be in an advertisement that is really bad. ... But I feel a bit rotten inside when I take part in things that are not true to my ideals.

This informant is interesting because he articulates values that are not acceptable according to the charismatic myth of the artist, yet he is totally aware of this. When he chooses to work in the field of advertising, he feels that he is touching on something that is a taboo among actors. Nonetheless, he seems somewhat untroubled by the fact that he has worked in advertising. At the same time, he argues that there are limits to what he is willing to do. For instance, he would not participate in the marketing of certain products (e.g. he mentioned pornography). However, the most important limitation for him seemed to be related to the quality of the production. He did not want to be strongly associated with any particular product either. When he is offered work in advertising, he looks at the idea behind the sketch he will play to determine if it is entertaining or amusing. If the sketch is good in its own right, regardless of the product in question, then he has no problems with participating:

It is important that the idea is a good one, an amusing idea. Because as long as it is amusing and people laugh, I think you can advertise anything and get away with it.

His integrity as an artist would only be affected if he joined productions that he considered poor quality. This could be interpreted as a sign that the traditional limits have not been totally abandoned, but have rather become more flexible as the young artists shape their careers.

All in all, we discovered roughly the same attitude towards commercialisation among the young artists after they had entered the professional art world (second phase) as among the art students while they were still in art school (first phase). The ambivalent attitude towards commercialisation seems to persist after the artists have left art school and (in most cases) tried to make a living from art.

Alternative Career Plans

None of the young artists we interviewed had alternative career plans if for one reason or another they were forced to abandon their artistic careers. This indicates a strong dedication to this career. Even those informants who held the most pragmatic attitudes to their work, who refuted the idea that working as an artist was special or extraordinary in comparison to so called "normal" careers, also emphasised that they had no alternative career plans. One male actor told us that he thought it is absolutely necessary not to have any alternative plans because this might distract him and destroy his chances of becoming a good actor:

I think that as an actor you shouldn't have such a reserve plan. ... Then you won't be fully focused – 100% in focus – and I think that is necessary. ... You have to go in for it; if you want to be good, you have to go for it.

So what might halt the career of a young artist against their will? One visual artist told us that the only reason he could imagine would be if he became seriously disabled:

Yes, if I got totally disabled, for example, or mentally disabled. I don't know. But I can't imagine any other reasons. But if I died of course ...

Similarly, the visual artist claims that the strength of determination to become an artist is one of the advantages in succeeding with his career:

It can be hard sometimes [the feeling of having no choice], but it is also to my advantage; because when all the others don't have any more left to give, then I still feel I have no choice, and just have to continue with my work.

The young artists' dedication to their choice of career is, in this sense, convincing. When one knows that it will be difficult for all the students to succeed as artists, the question of what they find so attractive about the occupation arises. Why are they so vigorous in the pursuit of their artistic careers? One female actor answered as follows:

There is no other occupation I could imagine. And I feel a bit tied up by my own choice. It's just as if ... it's a bit like heroin, if you see what I mean. I feel addicted. ... Because I think it's so fantastic. It is in a way like a kind of kindergarten, we are allowed ... it's totally fantastic to be allowed to do this. And I have no idea of what could fill me from top to toe in the same way as this does.

To a great extent, the intense and enchanted existential feeling they experience when they are practising their occupation seems to make up for the uncertainty related to being young artists with insecure future prospects. This strong dedication, involving no alternative choice, can certainly also be interpreted as a reflection of the charismatic myth (cf. Menger 1989).

Conclusion

In this study we have treated the charismatic myth as a discourse that may continuously be reproduced and changed in relation to specific social and cultural contexts. On the one hand, our analysis concludes that despite the processes of deinstitutionalisation and dedifferentiation the charismatic myth of the artist is a surprisingly important resource in the identity construction of young artists today. On the other hand, we find reason to stress that the charismatic myth of the artist is challenged by contextual changes that eventually result in re-interpretations of the myth's content. In our material, the reflections upon the relevance of the boundary between the spheres of art and commerce, and the emphasis on hard work as an important component in achieving success, are aspects that may be related to re-interpretations of the myth and are vital for young artists. The friction produced between the co-existing importance of the charismatic myth and the ongoing processes of cultural change may be interpreted as a source for the ambivalences we have illustrated throughout our analysis.

NOTES

1. To be sure, it would be interesting to compare our analysis to studies of young artists in other countries. However, to our knowledge there exist few similar and comparable studies.
2. For an overview of different uses of the concept of discourse, see e.g. Wetherell *et al.* (2001).

3. We rely upon Bourdieu's (1996) analysis of the development of art as a relatively autonomous field in the nineteenth century.
4. Joseph Beuys, cited in Duve (1999, p. 284). The full quotation in Duve's text is: "The most important element, for someone looking at my objects, is my fundamental thesis: every human being is an artist. This is even my one contribution to 'Art history'."
5. Elstad and Pedersen estimate that from 1979/80 to 1994, the number of professional artists increased by 30–40%.
6. The number of Norwegian art students abroad seems to have increased fourfold from 1986–87 to 1998–99 (Mangset 2004, p. 207). However, this estimate is a little uncertain because the categories of available statistics have changed during this period.
7. The response pattern of students of architecture in this study is quite similar to that of art students. This is not surprising: They belong to a "creative profession" not so different from the "artist professions". In Nordic artist policy, some categories of architects have also been considered "artists" (Elstad & Pedersen 1996).
8. The art student categories in the quantitative survey varied somewhat from the categories included in the qualitative interviews (i.e. visual art, theatre and music). The survey included visual art, crafts, theatre, dance and opera students, but no music students. It also included a number of students from regional academies (Bergen). The survey was conducted in autumn 2000 among students who had just commenced their studies. A similar (but methodologically weaker) study was conducted in spring 2001 among students in their final year. The results of this second study corresponded very well with the first one (Mangset 2004).
9. The change of views on the questions about talent from the first to the second phase may be interpreted both as a result of the altered situation of the informants and an artefact of the interview situation. According to a discourse perspective, however, there is no reason to expect informants to talk consistently (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). Rather, it must be assumed that the same person address the same question with different perspectives and ideas in different contexts.
10. For those students who have completed an education in the arts in Norway, there are considerable variations in job opportunities in the various branches of the arts. The labour market has been more favourable for performing artists (with dancers as an important exception) than for creative artists.
11. "All 'bout the money" – the title of the hit by the Swedish artist Meja from the album *Seven Sisters* (1998).
12. Which is roughly US\$30,000. Indeed, compared to other categories of artists in Norway and abroad, Norwegian actors have relatively high incomes.

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