The Creation of Artistic Space

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The Creation of Artistic Space

Abstract

From the introduction

The lives of artists have fascinated scholars for centuries. Artists' unique style of creative expression is reflected in their psychological life and in their physical studios and spaces in which they work. Unlike many earlier artists, twenty-first-century artists often write narratives about their own experiences with the creative process (Tharp 2003: 15). This allows for a greater accumulation of literature on the creative process and artistic space. By constructing their lives around their work, professional artists create a unique relationship with the physical, which helps to sustain their inspiration. Needing to be aware of their own creative rhythm, artists' lifestyle perpetuates their productivity (Tharp 2003: 15).

This thesis investigates the physical and psychological environment in which art (painting, sculpture, glass, dance, etc.) is created and how particular spaces serve as catalysts for artists. Specifically, is there is a connection between physical spaces, which artists construct to promote their own creative inspiration, and the social spaces of artistic production in relationship to a community of shared thoughts and ideas? My research will act as a small case study, which asks a larger ethnographic question: how can we account for the genesis of artistic production in our society today?

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THE CREATION OF ARTISTIC SPACE

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Pacific University Undergraduate Thesis

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I dedicate this thesis to Cheleen Mahar, Chris Wilkes, Craig Honeycutt, for all the support and faith they have had in me throughout my education.
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I live with my art. It is all around my bed, I could easily live in a giant one-room house.

—Greg Adams

The gift of the artist is being able to transfer the imaginary space of a story into the mind of another. What art does is bring together the dark and the light. It doesn’t avoid the dark.

—Cindy Smith

The unlit walls and corners of the studio created an illusion of sitting in the center of an endless dark abyss. The extra tables, easels, and miscellaneous furniture became animated creatures of an imagined world. The single art light above my head illuminated the paper below my hand, fracturing my pencil’s shadow into three weak lines that fell across the page. There is no sound except the scratching of graphite on textured paper. This is my space; a place no one else can enter, for it can only materialize when all others vanish. It is a space within the physical chaos of the studio that becomes the playground of the Muse.

It was not an easy journey to discover this place; seven years of dedicated study of classical drawing and painting has shaped the relationship I have to my work. My art became an identity that shaped my relationship to the world and the process of learning the craft matured my skills of perception and observation.

A local artist in my hometown agreed to mentor me in art beginning in my fourth year of elementary school. After school I would walk to the studio and spend the evenings studying the works of classical masters (Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Bernini,...etc). The discipline of art created a personal ritual during my days, and what was once the painstaking, tear-wrenching exercise of
drawing or painting exercises became a relaxing expression of self. This shift altered time, the very fabric of my reality; the hours of tenuous exercising of art technique became second nature, which allowed for the creative process to take hold and begin animating itself. This was the birth of my Muses; most were silent and passive, appearing only as faces within drawings, but the others became imagined parts of my physical world. Their presence was faint at first, whispers within the hypnotic state of deep concentration. As my comfort grew within the imagined space that removed all other people from the world, Muses became the center pinnacle of my artistic reality. They not only existed within my creative space, they defined it. The muses and creatures appeared in the silence of my dark space of inspiration and would alter a simple drawing into something experienced by the viewer.

These personal experiences of years of drawing and painting inspired this thesis. I wanted to delve deeper into the way space itself, both psychological and physical, interacts with artists in their process for cultural production.

The lives of artists have fascinated scholars for centuries. Artists’ unique style of creative expression is reflected in their psychological life and in their physical studios and spaces in which they work. Unlike many earlier artists, twenty-first-century artists often write narratives about their own experiences with the creative process (Tharp 2003:15). This allows for a greater accumulation of literature on the creative process and artistic space. By constructing their lives around their work, professional artists create a unique relationship with the physical, which helps to sustain their inspiration. Needing to be aware of their own creative rhythm, artists’ lifestyle perpetuates their productivity (Tharp 2003:15).
This thesis investigates the physical and psychological environment in which art (painting, sculpture, glass, dance, etc.) is created and how particular spaces serve as catalysts for artists. Specifically, is there a connection between physical spaces, which artists construct to promote their own creative inspiration, and the social spaces of artistic production in relationship to a community of shared thoughts and ideas? My research will act as a small case study, which asks a larger ethnographic question: how can we account for the genesis of artistic production in our society today?

People are often amazed to hear about the artist who can produce dozens of pieces and is continuing work on the next one. It is hard to imagine having the motivation to sit hours upon hours and create new ideas. The relationship with the artist’s own constructed space might hold a key to understanding the deeper secrets of inspiration and motivation. Is it a personal passion, or is it also sociological? Does the constructed space include a physical component or is it created psychologically through the artistic process? Understanding how artists remain inspired opens a window onto the cultural/spatial center of the creative process.

It is my assertion that professional artists construct lifestyles that intentionally keep them inspired. If this assertion is correct, my investigation will demonstrate how inspiration relates to constructed spaces, how psychology and inspiration on the one hand are connected to physical space on the other. Intentionality is also a special process and thus appropriate for an ethnographic study. Thus, particular importance is focused on the question of whether or not these constructed spaces are individually formed, or does this process formation relate to social fields of artistic production? The focal point of this thesis examines how artists use and create space, which helps them to remain productive. Although the idea of constructed space has been a topic of academic interest before (Bourdieu 1993:216), it has not been explored through the lens
of how it may influence artistic inspiration. I plan to examine this relationship by conducting an ethnographic examination including semi-structured interviews with five different artists in Oregon in an attempt to reveal their creative relationship to space and cultural production.

**Ethnographic Methods**

There are many important elements that make good fieldwork. Fredorak discusses basic ethical guidelines and challenges of working in the field in *Anthropology Matters*. Fredorak argues, “Ethical guidelines are an important part of ethnographic research. Anthropologists owe their allegiance first and foremost to the people they are studying—without their trust, an anthropologist’s work becomes difficult if not impossible” (2007:10). The gaining of trust is demonstrated in “Tricking and Trapping: Fieldwork on Prostitution in the Era of AIDS,” by Claire E. Sterk, who spent “ten years in the New York City and Atlanta metropolitan areas” (2000:17) doing qualitative research on prostitution. In the six months I have used to research artists I have not had as much time to immerse myself in their culture as might be necessary for a complete study, but the work will open a window for future in-depth research. Sterk’s “main source of data was participant observation on streets, in hotels and other settings known for prostitution activity” (2000:17). One of the most difficult aspects of researching this topic she argues was gaining trust and making relationships with informants. She began by:

visiting various locations... to learn more about new settings. In a sense, I was developing ethnographic maps of street prostitution. After several visits to a specific area, I also was able to expand these maps by adding information about the general atmosphere on the stroll, general characteristics of various people present, the ways in which women and customers connected, and the overall flow of action. In addition, my visits allowed the regular actors to notice me. (Sterk 2000:17)

The approach Sterk uses to begin mapping the broader elements of the metropolitan areas creates a foundation for her future research. Mapping is an important part of ethnographic work and gaining access to my informants had different challenges. Sterk’s experience illuminates the
importance of developing relationships slowly and patiently. Unlike Sterk’s experience in her fieldwork, building relationships with artists will not be as problematic, but using her approach to observation and mapping was useful in structuring the initial phase of my research.

The most important step of attaining Sterk’s first ‘in’ was through finding common ground and sharing the truths about her interest in the prostitutes lives, “I mentioned that I was interested in prostitution and wanted to write a book about it” (Sterk 2000:18). She argues, “qualitative researchers often refer to their initial connections as gatekeepers and key respondents. Throughout my fieldwork I learned that some key respondents are important in providing initial access, but they become less central as the research evolves” (2000:18). This advice suggests that although there are general guidelines to performing ethnographic research, each study is unique and will present problems that need to be strategically solved.

Another important factor that influences research as Fredorak highlights is gender. Fredorak argues, “gender is one of the determining factors in field experience” (2007:8). For example “Hazel Weidman (1970) found her field experience difficult because she was a single woman, and single women did not live alone in Burma, especially given the high crime rate” (Fredorak 2007:8). Sterk illustrates that gender played a significant role in her research because it determined whether she had access to many of her informants. She states, “I am unsure if I would have had success in gaining entrance to the scene had I not been a woman” (Sterk 2000:18). Although gender may not be as significant an issue in my research of creative spaces it is important to acknowledge gender roles influences on fieldwork.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of artistic identity and its relationship to labor and spaces at the heart of this research. Allison Bain "...examines the role of the studio as a central site of artistic identity construction" (2004:171) among women in Toronto, Canada. Collecting ten case studies, mostly of women artists, Bain conducted ten months of ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews to explore the relationship between the identity of women as artists and how it is tied to their studio. Her research illuminates a relationship between artistic identity and the physical workspace of artists that relates to the topic of space as a means of cultural production. Bain asked, what role did the studio play in constructing and maintaining artistic identity for women?

In a second article, “Constructing Artistic Identity,” Bain investigated “occupational identity construction among contemporary Canadian professional visual artists” (2005:25). Using the idea that “the activity of work is central in understanding how people choose to identify themselves” (Bain 2005:27), Bain tied the idea of professional artist to the identity of work. She used in-depth semi-structured interviews of 80 visual artists in Toronto to investigate the question of what defines a professional artist. Although this study is not directly related to physical space, it is related to the construction of identity through work. Being an artist, as Bain argued, is based on cultural stereotypes and myths that relates to their relationship with the physical world. She asserted, “the consumption of myths is one way in which artists reinforce an occupational identity, but the labour of artistic practice is also an important component of artistic identity construction. Artistic labour is usually represented as a solitary artist working in isolation in his or her studio, pursuing a uniquely individual creative vision” (2005:42). In her study Bain illustrated this construction of identity, as one the artists she interviewed would assert
is part of a socially undervalued visual literacy (2005:34). This identity, shaped through the assumption of social under-appreciation, is important to address in my own study. How do artists feel about their relationship to their culture, and how does that interaction shape how artists create and connect with their spaces?

The complete ethnography, *Seven Days in the Art World*, by Sarah Thornton, explores the complexity of the tiered subcultures in the professional world of art. This ethnographic study addresses three major questions: how do works of art 'become' famous; why has art become so popular; and, how does the art world function? This topic does not interact with the broader world of artists directly through research, but it does draw upon underlying factors concerning the importance of constructed space in the professional world of art. These factors include the gallery spaces, the professionalism as an artist, artistic recognition, but most importantly the transformation of identity of the psychological identity of an artist once a work enters a famous gallery. As well, it helps place the artist within the context of a complex social and cultural community.

A similar and more relevant article “Creative Spaces” by Chai Woodham, discusses “the connection between artists and their studio work spaces” (2007:1). Similarly, this present study focuses on how the creation of space illustrates the thought process of the artist. By examining the workspace of the artist one can tell a lot about how the artist works. Woodham draws upon previous literature and photographers encounters with artists to conclude that “the connection between artists and their environment is plainly evident” (2007:1). Woodham asserts, “the connection between artists and their environment can often illuminate the thought process that

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goes into the creation of art and even tell observers much more about who the artist is, in addition to how they work” (2007:1). This article’s focus is important to address for my study, for it broadens the view of environment to allow for a more holistic examination of an artist’s life.

Space is an invaluable element of art presentation and economy. This includes museum space and gallery shows. Thornton argues, “the art world is a sphere where many people don’t just work but reside full-time. It’s a ‘symbolic economy’ where people swap thoughts and where worth is debated rather than determined by brute wealth” (2008:xii). Thornton’s study illuminates the artificial construction of art value and cultural symbolism. This symbolic representation of art and the artist are stereotypifications, and they help in defining artistic identity and cultural relationships.

Another important perspective is presented in Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache, by Keith H. Basso. Basso examines, through an ethnographic lens, how the Apache people use places in the landscape of their home as symbols. His approach illuminates the importance of “place-making” in Apache lives, where he argues “place-making is a way of constructing the past... a means of doing history it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process personal social identity” (Basso 1996:7). Places make identity. This book does not relate to the art world directly, but the importance of space in constructing identity and holding personal meaning directly connects to the artist’s constructed space. Twyla Tharp a famous choreographer, illustrates this relationship of space as influencing the creative process:

2 “Retrospective world building... does not require special sensibilities or cultivated skills.” (Basso 1996:5). Places
In my early years in New York City, I studied with the choreographer Merce Cunningham. Merce had a corner studio on the second floor at 14th Street and Eighth Avenue, with windows on two sides. During breaks in classes, I watched a lot of traffic out those windows, and I observed that the traffic patterns were just like Merce’s dances—both appear random and chaotic, but they’re not. It occurred to me that Merce often looked out of those windows, too. I’m sure the street pattern was consoling to him, reinforcing his discordant view of the world. His dances are all about chaos and dysfunction. That’s his creative DNA. He’s very comfortable with chaos and plays with it in all his work. My hunch is that he came to chaos before he came to that studio, but I can’t help wondering if maybe he selected the place because of the chaos outside the windows. (Tharp 2002:36)

Tharp’s observation of how the chaos of the world outside the studio windows reflected the dances Cunningham created sheds light upon the possible relationship between the creative space and artistic production. Using her experience as a stepping-stone I will investigate if other artists in different professions, are similarly affected by the world beyond their workspace.

The relationship between the artist and creative space has also been explored through the lens of the American writer James Lord, in his book *A Giacometti Portrait*. Lord does not intentionally use his experience in the studio of Alberto Giacometti to explain the relationship of the artist to his space, but his book illustrates the intimate and personal interaction between himself, the artist and his created studio space. He narrates his experience of having his portrait painted by Giacometti, and in doing so, Lord takes detailed notes of the interaction between the artist, his studio, and the numerous art projects. Lord explains the space in relationship to Giacometti “We went down the open passage way to his studio. He began at once to work with the clay of a slender female figure... which had been his constant preoccupation for the past weeks” (1965:4). This small action may seem to have little to do with the construction of space, but in fact, it is an important element of how Giacometti has constructed his life in relationship to his art. His space was one that is filled with unfinished works that sit out for him to chip away at

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slowly. The constant activity on separate pieces of art is a reflection of the artist’s personality and directly corresponds with the way he constructed his studio space for artistic production. Lord’s experience, although not written within an anthropological lexicon, opens a window into the life of a famous artist and illustrates how an artist functions within the unique space of his studio.

To investigate artists’ relationship to constructed space and their craft further, I decided to examine writings artists have had published about their professions. Their work explores the investigation of professionalism, resistance, personal habit, and creative space. Steven Pressfield, the bestselling author of Gates of Fire, confronts routine as a vital part in his relationship to creativity in his book: The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Own Creative Battles. He asserts that he is a professional, for he understands that “there’s a secret that real writers know that wannabe writers don’t, and the secret is this: It’s not the writing part that’s hard. What’s hard is sitting down to write. What keeps us from sitting down is Resistance” (Pressfield 2003:iii). Pressfield argues that it does not matter how poor the product of the effort, but that it matters just that one makes the effort, to sit down and write (2003:i–ii).

The writing by many artists directly relates to space and their creative process. For example, Twyla Tharp wrote The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life. Here Tharp directly illustrates her relationship to her dance studio “this empty room symbolizes something profound, mysterious, and terrifying: the task of starting with nothing and working your way toward creating something whole and beautiful...” (2003:5). Confronting her studio reveals her relationship to a constructed space. Tharp goes on to explain:

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4 The term artist in this context refers to all professions of art: dancing, writing, painting, acting... etc.
some people find this moment—the moment before creativity begins—so painful that they simply cannot deal with it. They get up and walk away.... They procrastinate. In its extreme most form, this terror totally paralyzes people.... The blank space can be humbling. But I’ve faced it my whole professional life. It’s my job. It’s also my calling. Bottom line: Filling this empty space constitutes my identity. (2003:5–6)

An artist’s unique relationship to the creative process is related to their physical environment as Tharp argues:

After so many years, I have learned that being creative is a full-time job with its own daily pattern. That’s why writers, for example, like to set routines for themselves.... The real secret is they do this every day.... They are disciplined. Over time, as the daily routines become second nature, discipline morphs into habit.... Creativity [is] augmented by routine and habit.... Creativity is a habit, and the best creativity is a result of good work habits. (2003:6–7)

Steven King the bestselling author, also discusses space he uses to create in his narrative in On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft. “I am in a another place, a basement place where there are lots of bright lights and clear images. This place I have built for myself over the years. A far-seeing place” (King 2000:95). What King refers to as the space he created for himself is a combination of the physical and imagined. It is a projection of his artistic creativity onto a space, which is his personal place for cultural production.

I argue that artistic space is directly related to creativity, and understanding constructed space means exploring the comprehension of creativity. Perception of creativity is a cultural phenomena as Rollo May discusses in The Courage to Create. He argues that “The artist thus expresses the spiritual meaning of their culture” (1994:23-24) and suggests that this work has a direct cultural relationship with death. For the artist he asserts, “By the creative act, however, we are able to reach beyond our own death. This is why creativity is so important....” (1994:25). By exploring how space influences artistic production and personal identity it may become clearer how through one’s individual ‘habits’ artists maintain creative productivity.
There are many important elements about artists and their production that are often overlooked. One such element is the illusive Muse. King, Pressfield, and Tharp address the idea of the Muse, as the personified entity that holds the key to their work. King states:

There is a muse...traditionally, the muses were women, but mine's a guy; I'm afraid we'll just have to live with that... but he's not going to come fluttering down into your writing room and scatter creative fairy-dust all over your typewriter or computer station. He lives in the ground. He's a basement guy. You have to descend to his level, and once you get down there you have to furnish an apartment for him to live in. You have to do all the grunt labor, in other words, while the muse sits and smokes cigars and admires his bowling trophies and pretends to ignore you. Do you think this is fair? I think it's fair. He may not be much to look at, that muse-guy, and he may not be much of a-conversationalist (what I get from mine is mostly surly grunts, unless he's on duty), but he's got the inspiration. It's right that you should do all the work and burn all the midnight oil, because the guy with the cigar and the little wings has got a bag of magic. There's stuff in there that can change your life. Believe me, I know. (2000:139)

The idea of the Muse is one that has influenced artists for centuries, and it has played an important role in many of their lives and professions. Stephen Pressfield draws upon:

Socrates, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, on the 'noble effect of heaven-sent madness':
The third type of possession and madness is possession by the Muses. When this seizes upon a gentle and virgin soul it rouses it to inspired expression in lyric and other sorts of poetry, and glorifies countless deeds of the heroes of old for the inspiration of posterity. But if a man comes to the door of poetry untouched by the madness of the Muses, believing that technique alone will make him a good poet, he and his sane compositions never reach perfection, but are utterly eclipsed by the performances of the inspired madman. (2002:113)

In studying creative space and the way artists interact with the world of cultural production, it is important to investigate their relationships with the mythical Muse. Do they have a unique personified version of a Muse like King’s little winged cigar-smoking man, or is the Muse projected onto real elements of the creative process as Tharp states that her Muse is ‘my

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5 The Muses were the nine sisters, daughters of Zues and Mnemosyne, which means 'memory.' Their names are Clio [history], Erato [love poetry and lyric poetry], Thalia [comedy], Terpsichore [dance and coral song], Coliope [epic poetry], Polynymia [sacred song], Euterpe [music], Melpomene [tragedy], and Urania [astronomy]. Their job is to inspire artists. Each Muse is responsible for a different art. (Pressfield 2002:113)
dancers" (Tharp 2003:58)? What role does the Muse play in the lives of modern day artists? How would each artist define the Muse? Do most artists have a Muse(s)? These are questions this project will need to explore further. The literature indicates that there are many different ways in which individual artists view their work and what inspires them. The artists who discuss their Muse have related it directly to their creativity and where they work.

Among academics, the exploration of creativity is generally from a psychological or philosophical approach. Creativity, according to Vincent Tomas, is the act of producing something new; “to create is to originate. And it follows from this that prior to creation the creator does not foresee what will result from it” (Tomas 1958:4). Tomas’s work he does not draw from ethnographic work or personal interaction, but his critique of creativity suggests the need for a more in-depth understanding of how artists as individuals relate it to their lives. His question is basically: what is creativity? It was useful to apply this question to my fieldwork in order to better understand how individual artists perceive their own art and what creativity means to them.

Munro’s argument follows the timeline of how psychology has changed its approach to the examination of art. Munro’s theoretical approach draws together many of the issues with regard to how the field of psychology explores art. He “explains the phenomena of human behavior and experience in relation to works of art,” (Munro 1963:266) and “that everything that is written or said about art and artists is a kind of behavior” (Munro 1963: 266). This he argues means they


7 “[T]he term ‘art,’ in this connection, is meant in its aesthetic sense as including the visual, musical, literary, and theater arts”(Munro 1963:267).
“tend to neglect the aspects which are most important from a psychological point of view: the inner motivations, the modes of thought and feeling, the development of creative and aesthetic abilities, which lie behind the external manifestations” (Munro 1963:266).

Philosophers have focused on the condition and basis of the creative drive, as Krishnamurti presents in *Think on These Things.* He writes: “creativeness has its roots in the initiative which comes into being only when there is deep discontent” (Krishnamurti 1970:37). He claims, “without the flame of discontent you will never have the initiative which is the beginning of creativeness” (Krishnamurti 1970:37).

To further examine the ideas of behind the architecture of creative space, it is vital to evaluate how artists construct their identities and relate to their work. Krishnamurti illuminates an underlying myth about artists that is further addressed in *Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Art Making,* by David Bayles and Ted Orland. This is the relationship of deep emotional confrontation and discontent to art that Bayles and Orland argue, drives artists’ creativity. This is because “To the artist, all problems of art appear uniquely personal…. That’s understandable enough, given that not many other activities routinely call one’s basic self-worth into question. But those really personal problems all relate to the making of art” (Bayles and Orland 1993:65). In this thesis, this underlying myth of ‘emotional confrontation and discontent’ is an important part of the cultural construction of artistic identity. In the closer inspection of artists’ habitus and their relationship to creative production, this myth becomes relevant, and could influence how artists construct their space.

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9 Habitus- "The durable disposition we have inside of us which shape our action, a product of personality and history" (Bourdieu 1985:4)
It is important to contextualize the relationship between artists and constructed space by examining cultural context. Although Fibian Lukalo’s focus is how traveling musicians use music to construct identity in urban spaces, it underlines the importance of contextualization. It is important to “contextualize the debate of urban spaces experiencing cultural, social, political and economic change in the East African region” (Lukalo 2008:254). Contextualization of the artistic space within society is important in addressing the relationship between the cultural production of the space and its interaction with other cultural spheres. To place the artist within a cultural context will allow for a more holistic investigation of how the culture shapes the artist and in turn the artist influences and reflects the culture through production and created space.

One aspect of how space influences an artist that has not been explored in literature directly is how the education in specific arts influences the type of space an artist uses to create. It seems logical to assume that a dance studio would inspire a dancer, but how does this process occur? How does the training and practice of an artist shape their creative space? Twyla Tharp explores this idea indirectly. She explains how the underlying skills that are mastered will help formulate creativity. For example, Tharp asserts:

Pope Leo X heard that Leonardo da Vinci was experimenting with the formulas for varnishes instead of executing a painting. He declared, "this man will never do anything, for he begins thinking about the end before the beginning of his work." However, Leonardo understood that the better you know the nuts and bolts of your craft, the more fully you can express your talents. The great painters are incomparable draftsmen.... No task is too small to be worthy of their attention. (Tharp 2002:162)

Tharp asserts that the development and mastering of foundational skills in a specific artistic craft, is a fundamental aspect of creative expression. Tharp argues, “What all these people [professional artists] have in common is that they have mastered the underlying skills of their

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creative domain, and built their creativity on the solid foundation of those skills. You're only kidding yourself if you put creativity before craft” (2002:163). Although, here, Tharp is explaining creativity and expression in terms of skill mastery, it is an aspect of an artist’s life that will affect the way they relate to their creative space. In order to place an artist within their cultural context it is vital to understand where and how they developed their skills. The history of how each artist experiences their skill development and craft learning will bring to light how they developed their creative space.

3. METHODS CHAPTER

Qualitative Research

The fieldwork for this study was conducted and analyzed through qualitative methods. This allows for the researcher to account for personal bias, allowing for subtleties in the research to be noted. This kind of research allows for a descriptive holistic accumulation of information, which gives space for the voices of individuals to express how they make sense of their lives.

Unlike quantitative studies which focus on the numerical representation of a specific topic, qualitative research, as John Creswell addresses in his book Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches, “is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details” (1994:145). The researcher plays an important role in the gathering and analysis of information in the field. For this study of how artists use and shape space for cultural production, I use a combination of both structured interviews and ethnographic methods of observation to collect data. These methods are best for answering the question of this thesis, because they focus on the individual experience of the artist. This allows informants to
guide the researcher through their personal experiences and own observations, which remove the limitations, set by quantitative studies.

**Interviews**

There are many different ways to conduct interviews as Michael Schumacher illustrates in his book *Creative Conversations: The Writer’s Complete Guide to Conducting Interviews*. Schumacher states, “Through interviews we exchange information, listen to opinions, enjoy anecdotes, and learn more about people’s characters—all of which we are able to pass along to our readers. In every sense, interviews are literary conduits” (1990;2). He stresses, “Research is the foundation upon which the good interview is built” (Schumacher 1990;27). This means that it is vital to have an in-depth understanding of the topic before asking for an interview. This foundation came naturally for Sterk whose research process I have duplicated, because she was required to spend an exhaustive amount of time mapping the subculture she was investigating. As Sterk states, “I did not begin conducting official interviews until I developed relationships with the women” (2000;19). Sterk emphasizes the importance of trust and relationships in her ethnographic work, and this she argues is especially important in interviewing. She discovered that “none of the women refused to sign the consent form, although some refused to sign it right away and asked to be interviewed later…. Only by letting women identify their salient issues and the topics they wanted to address was I able to gain an insider’s perspective” (Sterk 2000;19). Using the well-known open-ended and semi-structured interview schedule creates a structure for my interviews in the field. Beginning with open-ended questions I can supplement conversation, observation and interactions with informants as well as create structured questions using their language as to how they perceive the use of space in the creation of their art. This allows me to ask questions...
about contradictions that may appear later in my research as I launch into my structured interviews and uncover other complexities in the approach they take to their work.

Schumacher discusses the importance of setting time limits, and strategies to acquiring the information needed. Schumacher states, “Once you have an idea of the angle you hope to pursue, you can focus your attention on designing an interview that increases your chances of getting the information your seeking” (2000:40). This development of a framework of questions have built skills in nonverbal communication in addition to wasting as little time as possible. I use Schumacher’s framework of interviewing to help structures my time and build my research questions.

The interview process was, at first, intimidating and I found the first interview I preformed was choppy and unnaturally controlled. I was determined to follow my sheet of questions, which did not allow the conversation to flow naturally. I had a hard time keeping up with my field-notes and jottings. After I finished my formal questions, however, I continued to talk with my informant, and I found that without the structure the stories and valuable information began to flow. This experience helped shape the rest of my interviews. I let the informant guide the conversation, and found the flow answered my questions as the topics of their art developed. As I gained a better vocabulary for the field of professional art, I discovered the initial distrust and discomfort passed faster.

I conducted several interviews at the home or in the studio of the informant. One was recorded at a coffee shop and the other was done at my home and on the 'phone. They seemed very comfortable in the space they chose to talk with me and I found this to be an interesting part of the research process.
Ethnography

The ethnographic element of this study will be small, because of time restraints. I will be interviewing five artists\(^{11}\) as a pilot study for this project. If this study is continued in the future it will be important to spend the majority of the time doing fieldwork and a more in-depth ethnographic investigation. Participant observation is very important in the experience of space, but for this study the exploration of the individual spaces of each artist is limited. To further explain the artistic space, photographs will be included, if each informant gives permission.

The participant observation I was able to complete was limited, because I had so little time. I was able to spend more time with some informants than others, which limited my exposure to the rhythms and lifestyles of all the artists.

Informants

All the participants in this study are professional artists. I was introduced to them either by friends or through personal experience studying art. There were no other criteria for informants and all real names have been changed for confidentiality.

Alan Lee is a professional dancer, martial artist, and musician. He received an undergraduate degree at the California Institute of the Arts and a Masters degree in Conscious Evolution. He toured with the Peking Opera after graduation before moving to Connecticut where he currently makes a living as the caption of the dance company Pilobolus\(^{12}\) and teaching yoga and martial arts. Lee grew up composing symphonies and his current residence is divided into an open space where he and his partner rehearse dance and choreography and a den for music composition.

Andrea Morris is a professional ceramicist. One of her first memories is of working with clay. She received a Bachelor of the Arts in ceramics from Whitman College and has been selling and

\(^{11}\) This will include a potter, a painter, an actor, a dancer, and a writer.

\(^{12}\) Pilobolus is a dance company that travels around the world performing.
displaying her work up and down the West Coast ever since. She also works a part-time job to support herself and teaches students private lessons on the side. Morris’s studio is attached to her house, which allows her easy access to her work.

Charles Morgan is a professional actor for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon. He started acting in high school and received a Bachelor of the Arts in acting and directing from the University of Arizona. Accepting a full-ride scholarship to a University of Arizona graduate program, Morgan graduated with a Masters degree in acting and directing. He worked eleven seasons at an Arizona theater company, before being cast for a play at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. He is now celebrating his 20th season at the Festival and his 37th season as a professional actor.

Cindy Smith is a professional non-fiction writer. In high school she was the editor for the school literary journal. She received a Bachelor of the Arts in English, but she really wanted to act. In order to make money she chose writing over acting and now writing is her livelihood. She has had four of her own books published, and has helped over 65 other writers get their books published. Smith is back in graduate school in order to receive masters in education so she can teach writing to young people. She has moved many times throughout her life and is currently renting a large house, which has become her writing studio.

Greg Adams is a professional visual artist. He does painting, drawing, and sculpting. Adams started learning art in high school and after his service in the Air Force; he received a Bachelor of the Arts in art and received a certificate in illustration from a commercial art school. He went on to the University of Oregon where he changed his focus and received a Masters of Science in Art Education. He has spent a majority of his life after graduate school teaching at community institutions, and providing private art lessons, and working consistently on his own skills and
paintings. Adams has integrated his studio space into his house; he has a garage-sized studio space and a small workspace in his living room.

4. ANALYSIS

Creative Process and Physical Space

This thesis examines the complex relationship between the physical studio spaces that artists use when they are working, and the imaginary ‘bubble,’ which is created when an artist focuses on the task at hand. The basis of this relationship between physical and imaginary space is developed through the artists’ processes of mastering the essential tools of their specific craft. Twyla Tharp addressed the importance of first mastering the technical and mechanics of the art before one can become successful at a craft in her book, Creative Habit: Learn and Use it for Life, through first understanding the “nuts and bolts” before one can manipulate and create new forms effectively (2003:162). The education of the artistic craft is an essential component of the development of a lifestyle conducive to the demands and pressures of the professional world of art. The artist needs to form rituals, self-discipline, and individual relationship with inspiration; education is the foundation of the field of art and as such the base of an artist's professionalism. Informant Charles Morgan demonstrated his artistic process development and building of the skills needed in perfecting the craft of performing Shakespeare, “when I got here [Ashland Shakespeare Festival], I had not done much Shakespeare, and I was just kind of at a loss as to how to do it. It was like a foreign language to me.... So I watched the actors that I thought were

13 Field—“Which comprises the world in which struggles take place, such as an academic setting, a political system. Each social field has a set of rules and a group of these fields taken together comprises the social space we inhabit” (Bourdieu 1985:4).
good: just watched rehearsals and watched how they did it” (Morgan 2011). For Morgan it took time to develop the ‘code’ for the art of acting while he was in college. The process of learning of Shakespeare helped specialize his skills, mastering the poetic language so that he had access to the creative space of expression through the context of the performance. Morgan’s vivid memory of his learning experience shines light on the development of the skills needed by professional artists, which all my informants argue is a part of a never-ending road of learning.

Their education in art has helped them to built sections of the fundamental architecture of their craft and their relationship with the tools and physical space they use to work. It has uniquely fashioned their lives to support their talent and form a healthy sustainable work ethic. The studio space was explained to me as a place to hold the tools required for the specific craft of the artist. It is unique to art types, for example: a dance studio should have an open floor; a painting studio, space for easels and tables and proper lighting. The tools are a vital part of the space and are often considered separate from the room itself. The physical space provides room for personal artistic experimentation and discovering. A special area, my informants explained, was not totally necessary, yet after delving into the subject, the artists resolved that having this special space was very important. The need for individual space depends on the nature of the project and lifestyle of the artist, for some artists like working alone. This was best expressed by Andrea Morris a ceramicist:

One of the biggest reasons I wanted to have my own studio is that I feel like if I take risks it is easier if you don’t have people watching. If you are working on a new idea, sometimes you want to develop the idea, you know? I call it the ‘peanut gallery’, [when there are people] watching you, making comments, or swaying you necessarily one way or another, [working alone] you can really know that you process was your process. (2011)
The need to be alone is an individual experience and dependent on the art type. For example, with professional acting the art is done in relationship to other people and incorporates the social quality of the reading and the awareness of character interaction.

Studio space is not removed from the daily lives of the professional artist. Its four ‘walls’ contain the tools of creative construction. It is a safe place to create and explore new realms of ideas through the artistic field of technical knowledge, which is provided by the cultural education of the crafter. The physical space of the studio has many layers. It is oftentimes not confined to one place, instead integrated into different physical areas of the artist’s life. Each place has a different purpose, as explained by Greg Adams:

I think the ritual of having a place, a space for anything is important. When you’re in the space it changes your focus and your energy. And [it] allows you to shift gears so that you can do what you do in your sort of working space. So, even though I have several studios, I have three: one in the living room where I work on paintings; one very large space where I work on very large pieces and have classes; then, I have a sort of moving studio in my car and other locations in the house where I work... each one is a kind of station where there is a certain kind of expectation that comes with it and when I sit in those places I am kind of in that mode of thinking. (2011)

The studio space helps change the focus and the mindset of the artist, but the headscape is not limited to the space created by the studio. There is an aspect of the creative space which has been explained to me by several informants as independent from the physical space itself. Instead, as Cindy Smith asserts:

Because it has been my livelihood, the space has had to be flexible and practical.... Because I have moved a lot I think the space that I work in is right here! This is my space and it is a flexible one. It means if I have to work in a coffee shop, or if I have to work in my car, or at the library. (2011)

Yet later in the interview she augmented her statement and explained: “It depends upon the nature of the project. At times I can do fine, with just a pad of paper. Other times I have to have a computer and sometimes that computer has to be ensconced in the midst of a lot of papers. The
space creates itself. What you need, you will find. There is a magic in it” (Smith 2011). Perhaps this is due to the fact that as a professional, to accomplish the work needed one must be flexible, and able to work no matter the circumstance. When dependent on the space to work effectively it may not get done. Smith's words indicated that there is a complex relationship between an artist's focus and the work space. Instead, if space, like the studio, is viewed as a tool of the arts, it may be able to explain this incongruence. Smith explained:

The artists’ space is the inner world, and sometimes that inner world requires a specific external space for instance a performance piece. In working on it I need space, and that space has to be far emptier than the space I write in. It is not going to work for me to go into my office and create this performance piece. What is going to work, is for me to go into the living room. It has been cleared out. (2011)

Conceptualizing space as an artistic tool for cultural production allows for its presence to remain flexible and mobile in the life of the artist. I received conflicting responses from informants about the importance of studio space. Many argued as a professional they had to be flexible and mobile, but all informants admitted that without ‘their’ space they have a hard time working. When the space does not feel right the work ethic of professional training kicks in, as Lee explains:

I have been around the world three times so I have had to work in some pretty odd places you know, when you travel that much and you are forced to work because of your job, in places some people are like ‘oh, I don’t like the spirit of this place,’ ...but that doesn’t matter... we don’t have a choice, we have to do it. The wizard that only stays in his tower, he doesn’t see the rest of the world... a lot of artists get locked in their tower and are uninformed about the stresses of travel. (2011)

The professional artist must be able to work even when feeling uninspired. This is part of the discipline that governs their daily rhythms. They must be able to return to their work despite personal qualms or feelings of resistance. With this problem, there seems to be a space beyond the physical that takes hold, which forms a mind-space. We might think of it as a projected space that helps remove distractions and set the creative energy into the work.
The physical studio space contains the tools of the arts and, in turn, is a tool of the crafter, a safe place to express and work through artistic problems. But the artists’ concept of space goes beyond the studio walls. The artists I interviewed, referred to a ‘space’ that has no relationship to the physical dimensions or architecture of their chosen workspace. Rather the physical space should be reconsidered as forming a mindset:

It’s funny... even though the space is in a larger room when I am sitting in a chair whether I’m at the table doing drawings or in front of an easel, in a chair, the space seems to be like it's enveloped like there is an invisible egg around me of some kind like I’m living within it... like... the maybe the temperature is different but it feels like I am enveloped in an egg, when I am not really tightly surrounded by anything. It’s kind of a psychic thing. (Adams 2011)

The headspace Adams refers to happens when he turns his attention to his work. It is a focus, which allows for complete devotion of time to the creative process. For Greg Adams, “during the painting there is constant thinking and resolving situations and thinking of new things. The focus is a different emotional thing, it is generally not the same emotional state as prior to sitting in the chair” (Adams 2011). It is space where the knowledge and experience of creative problem-solving come together with creativity to synthesize the artistic skill and produce their work. How do artists come to this type of focus? What inspires it and where does it begin? Does it happen in all the artistic crafts, even those that involve constant interaction with other people, such as dancing and acting?

**The Cup Runs Over**

You know, Hitler wanted to be an artist. At eighteen he took his inheritance, seven hundred kronen, and moved to Vienna to live and study. He applied to the Academy of Fine Arts and later to the School of Architecture. Ever seen one of his paintings? Neither have I. Resistance beat him. Call it overstatement but I’ll say it anyways: it was easier for Hitler to start World War II than it was for him to face a blank square of canvas.

—Steven Pressfield
Self-discipline is one of the fundamental components of being a professional artist. It appears in different forms from artist to artist, but for each, it is part of a self-knowing and formulation of a lifestyle that synthesizes their art. Art is a profession and a lifestyle; learning the craft is an essential part of developing the discipline and personal rituals that hone the production and execution of inspired works. Without discipline, an artist’s inspiration and creativity are just ideas without the means for manifestation. The foundation provided by the artists’ education and experience shapes their creative process. As explained by my informants, professional artists have their own means of overcoming their resistance and fear of failure, a way of confronting not just the work at hand, but creating an awareness of personal ‘process.’ An important part of the discipline is knowing when to step back and allow for breaks and pauses in the process. These pauses can be decidedly intimidating, but have been explained to me as a natural part of the creative process, Cindy Smith states:

Writers' block... I have come to believe that it doesn’t exist, that is what I tell people. I call it a pause; I think in the creative process, so much gets given out that at a certain point replenishment has to happen. And when a person is not allowing a space for that, everything freezes... they are forced to take a step back and the depression or the fear comes up when the person does not understand that it is just part of the process. So, it feels like failure. ‘Your creative impulse is gone, you will never create again’ that is often what the ego says. (2011)

It is part of knowing one's own rhythms that allows for the pauses to happen and become a part of the lives of the artist. An awareness of the dangers of these ruts is an important part of being a professional artist, for they inspire fear and self-doubt. There was a synonymous belief about having pauses in creative production along with the feelings of failing and questions as to their artistic abilities. This fear of losing their ability to create may be tied to the underlying cultural expectation of the Protestant work ethic. The years of experience have helped my informants
construct mechanisms of handling these moments when they are lacking inspiration as Greg Adams explained:

I generally don’t get worried about it..., I get a little antsy. [Instead] I will spend the time working on studies when I don’t have ideas rolling around my head. I will study another artist’s composition; I will do sketches out of my head to generate images to create new kind of images, just to exercise the idea force of pulling things out of the well. Sometimes I will just stop. When things just stop... I make a choice to not do anything for a while and that feels good generally. I used to get worried when I was young, when things didn’t come right to me. (2011)

I asked Adams what had changed between his fear of stopping in his younger years and now and he responded, “Just thousands and thousands of lines, drawing thousands of lines, being an old sailor, a salt dog” (Adams 2011). For Greg the experience has taught him the rhythms of the artistic life and he argues the fear is no longer so present, but this was inconsistent with the observations in my fieldwork. Greg has mentioned being afraid of being unproductive and breaking the routine of painting three times a week. There are other factors that may play into the feeling of failing when one has to stop and take a break from the disciplined routine; a cultural expectation influenced by the Protestant mentality of hard work. Is the fear of the pauses a part of the inspiration and lifestyle of the artist or is it a greater cultural fear of allowing a more relaxed lifestyle? Does the American expectation of constant hard work contradict a fundamental aspect of the natural ebb and flow of the creative rhythm? This would require much more data and in-depth research to better explore these relationships between creativity, fear of cultural expectations, and the rejuvenation of energy that helps replenish inspiration.

There are many cultural stereotypes that suggest what an artist should be. There is the starving artist, the drug induced inspiration..., etc, but as a professional, art is a livelihood and one must be able to produce efficiently and not only when feeling inspired. Alan Lee comments:
“What I noticed at Cal Arts\textsuperscript{14} is a lot of artists dress up like artists and yet lack the ability and drive to perfect their work. You need a lot of self-discipline and you need a healthy way of dealing with your obsessive need to create, but also your way of disciplining yourself to stop” (Lee 2011). Discipline creates a means for a continuous progression of inspiration and practice; it shapes a healthier lifestyle that accommodates ‘down time’ and breaks from creation and artistic work. It is a very necessary part of regimenting study, which is required for keeping artistic skills sharp. This was an important element for Lee with regard to his martial arts and dance as he explained:

Someone asked me why I study martial arts, and I said, ‘Well, I study martial arts so I can make a really good cup of coffee in the morning. It isn’t about kicking, it is about reactions and you don’t get those if you don’t practice and you have to build up your energy, like building a vessel, you build up your energy before the muse will transpire, and you have to practice, and build that energy so it can be filled properly and that is usually when the inspirational muse comes. No one will care in the professional world if you feel uninspired. (Lee 2011)

This touches on the difference between inspiration and personal discipline. To be professional, as Steven Pressfield argues:

When I say professional, I mean the professional as an ideal. The professional in contrast to the amateur…. The amateur plays for fun. The professional plays for keeps…. Someone once asked Somerset Maugham if he wrote on a schedule or only when struck by inspiration. “I write only when inspiration strikes,” he replied. “Fortunately it strikes every morning at nine o’clock sharp”…. In terms of Resistance, Maugham was saying, “I despise Resistance; I will not let it faze me; I will sit down and do my work”…. Maugham reckoned on another, deeper truth: that by performing the mundane physical act of sitting down and starting to work, he set in motion a mysterious but infallible sequence of events that would produce inspiration, as surely as if the goddess had synchronized her watch with his. He knew if he built it, she would come. (2003:63–64)

Artists must be able to work and practice their craft even when not stuck by inspiration. It is a way of keeping the gears oiled and as mentioned by Adams during a time of participant

\textsuperscript{14} The California Institute of the Arts.
observation, it is the discipline that helps bring him to new idea. He asserts, “it is internal vs. external. The internal problems try to give all the excuses for not doing it, but after sitting in the chair those problems are gone” (Adams 2011). The way my informants speak about their pauses in artistic production is more situational, it seems. It appears to come in many different forms and relationships to other activities away from the studio space: the need to go outside or remove the project from sight as explained by Andrea Morris, “if it is a piece [I am stuck on], I will cover it. Sometimes, I will do things like put it up so I can sit and watch a movie and look over at it. Because it is sculpture, I will put it and turn it and look at it from a different angles” (Morris 2011). Adams expressed to me one afternoon as I was observing an art lesson, that he takes walks almost every day, which is a very important part of his process. It helped to get exercise as well as clear his head. He told me, that depending on his energy level, he would walk on the hilly parts of town, where removing himself from his studio allowed for a kind of mental break which then allowed new ideas to be birthed.

Many of my informants argue that part of taking a break is due to specific situations and sections of the production process. As expressed by Lee, “you have to build up your energy, like building a vessel, you build up your energy before the muse will transpire” (Lee 2011), which indicated that the energy is not always present. So, what dissolves the energy that is created through practice and hard work? Andrea Morris and Cindy Smith both spoke about the dissolving of energy after the completion of large projects or presentations of their work. For example:

After a show quite often I will feel that let-down, that depression because you put so much energy into something and so often I will take a week or two off after that to take a break I almost feel like ideas to me ideas come out of this well, or it’s like recharging your battery and I really find taking time off helps replenish it. (Morris 2011)
For Smith there is a very similar experience. She states, “often after the completion of a project, there is a great emptiness; an exhausted depression and I need a break... just eat and sleep, I really believed that I would never have another creative thought in my life, nothing left, I can't even think anymore” (Smith 2011). The down time after the completion of a project is a vital aspect of the creative process, but it is also a dangerous place for the artist in terms of facing their personal fears of never being able to create again. They have to allow for these pauses and know when it is time to start facing their fear again and start a new project; returning to the mundane and exercising their craft, once again beginning to fill their creative cup of inspiration. But after the replenishing of energy Smith says that it all comes back and she is ready to begin another cycle of work.

**Ritual: 'Something for the Body, Something for the Mind'**

*There are things on my mind. Some are worries, some are good things, but right now all that stuff is up top. I'm in another place, a basement place where there are lots of bright lights and clear images. This is a place I have built for myself over the years. It's a far-seeing place. I know it's a little strange, a little bit of contradiction, that a far-seeing place should also be a basement place, but that's how it is with me.*

—Stephen King

Every artist I interviewed spoke of different types of rituals that changed their focus from the daily rhythm of life into a mode of artistic concentration. These activities at first seem to be ordinary routines that do not stand out from other parts of the artist’s life, but instead they are catalysts for a different type of energy. These different processes are rituals, which alters focus and creates an artistic space conducive to productive work.

I have a ritual; I wake up in the morning and make a strong cup of coffee. Then I train for two hours. Yoga or martial arts, then if I have lessons, I will teach and if not, I will play
music, read, or do something for my mind. So, in the morning I do something for my body and then for my mind. (Lee 2011)

The ritual begins with making the cup of coffee in the morning. It alters the focus of the day where the next intended step is to exercise the tools of artistic production. I have not experienced enough participant observation to fully understand the actual necessity of these rituals, but according to the information provided from the interviews each artist has a different combination of activities, which inspire the same type of mental focus. As Lee begins his ritual with a cup of coffee, Adams explains:

It seems the things that bring me to my work on the series of paintings that I work on all the time... happens around eight in the evening and end around eleven. I make dinner, eat, and sit down for a while: A kind of rejuvenation of energy, you know, making supper and resting a little bit. Then suddenly the energy changes and I get up and walk over to the chair, turn the light on and start fumbling with things to try and get them going... the fumbling of things and sitting in the chair is the actual light that turns the engine on to go. (2011)

The altering of headspace is part of the discipline of making sure the artwork is being done.

Every artist in my study spoke of the times when they felt completely uninspired and did not want to approach their work that day; they would rather do other things. But the ritual keeps them from evading their work, a personal kind of discipline, which inspires focus and once the focus is activated the resistance often dissipates as Greg Adams expresses:

When I am sitting at my painting in the living room, it’s on a big easel, and I have all my painting paraphernalia around me; when I sit down I am in the pilot seat, and it feels like it. Sitting down completes the ritual of starting to work. I can turn easily and prepare my colors and clean up the things, light everything and make adjustments and start working. (Adams 2011)

One informant explained that if she really resisted working on her pieces that day, she gave herself a time limit and if she still did not want to be working after that time, then she allowed herself to stop for the day. Charles Morgan, who depends on the steady income from his work with the Shakespeare Festival, and is now facing an ongoing threat of being laid off due to
increasing budget cuts, expressing his devotion to his work is very serious. His ritual consumes his whole day:

If I am doing an 8 o’clock curtain, my day will be built around that. In a ritual sense it would be: I would try to make sure that I eat well, and I will try to make sure that I don’t overdo physically during the day. Theater acting is a very ritualistic art, because we will be doing 120 performances, Measure For Measure, in a season so you will be telling this same story 120 times and what can be more ritualistic than that? I like to arrive at the theater at the same time before every performance… at least an hour before. Just so I get in the space. I start thinking about what I am going to be doing; I don’t ever want to be rushed…. It is very ritualistic, you go into your dressing room at the same time, because you know how long it takes you to put on your makeup, your costume… the more that is the same… the better…. For me it helps with the ritual. I am going to tell you this story [performance] again, but I am but I am going to make it seem like it is the first time that I have ever experienced it. (Morgan 2011)

These types of rituals change the focus of the individual artist. They create a space clear to perform the different techniques and knowledge and access the creative well of inspiration. This indicates that even for artists who live in constant interaction with the physical artistic space, such as my informants who have a studio attached to their homes, is a different ‘imaginative space,’ a ‘headspace,’ which has to be activated each time in order to work. The artist creates this space. As Cindy Smith says: “A separate space and quickly in that separate space, it is just me and whatever is that creative process. And when that happens it is the focus that creates the space. It is like a bubble, where everything else is still present, but not. You know the space is there, because you know when the space is disrupted” (2011). The development of the ritual is part of an artist’s self-discipline and perhaps developed in order to overcome the times when one is feeling completely uninspired. It creates a mental space that in a way dissolves the other distractions.

An interesting statement however that seems to be consistent over the different artistic disciplines is that it is possible to break the focus or ‘pop the bubble’. Another informant
explained that: the phone ringing breaks this bubble, and that she often will turn it off before entering her studio. The bubble that is inspired by the ritual and discipline is also breakable and this is where the need for a private or specific physical space is vital:

When I had people there [at my house] over my son’s break I couldn’t get anything done. I do have to have a dedicated space, because the creative process is going on all the time and if somebody comes in and interrupts it, it breaks it. So, I think that if you can create the bubble and that works with the particular art you are doing at the time, then fine, but if you are really going to seriously do something I think also, that the body and mind enter a space, like entering a temple in India. And maybe you are in a vibration field dedicated to the purpose… the accomplishment… the dedicated space does support discipline. (Smith 2011)

Once the space is gone or disrupted it becomes clear how much it is necessary for the artist. It is the tool that allows for the ritual to inspire the focus. Without the access to a proper physical space, no matter how flexible the artist, the creation of the focus is very difficult if not impossible.

Rituals remove obstacles of distraction and focus the artist. But they do not eliminate the resistance to doing work, as Adams explains, “... building up to sitting in the chair is where all the resistance is. It might be greatly due to fatigue or attitude, but 90 percent of the resistance leaves once I sit in the chair… The resistance is real and sometimes intense prior to sitting in the chair. It goes away almost always” (Adams 2011). The job of the rituals and creation of habits is

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15 “Resistance cannot be seen, touched, heard, or smelled. But it can be felt. We experience it as an energy field rotating from a work-in-potential. It’s a repelling force. It’s negative. Its aim is to shove us away, distract us, prevent us from doing our work” (Pressfield 2003:7).

“Resistances is fear of failure and fear of actualizing. One of the reasons I might resist is the fear of failing, and being face to face is like having a sword in your hand and being able to tame the beast…from anxiety to a creative place. Once the process begins that may completely disappear. It’s as though being in a boat, where you have to row to the chair, the resistance of an entire ocean before you, and once I sit in the chair it is as though a sail fills with creative wind and guides me easily on the course of work.” (Adams 2011)
it to discipline the artist in order to overcome the resistance and faces the fear of creating.

Stephen Pressfield addresses resistance in the context of the professional. He explains:

The amateur believes he must first overcome fear; then he can do his work. The professional knows that fear can never be overcome. He knows there is no such thing as the fearless worrier or a dread-free artist. What Henry Fonda does, after puking into the toilet in his dressing room, is to clean up and march out onstage. He’s still terrified but he forces himself forward in spite of his terror. He knows that once he gets out into the action, his fear will recede and he’ll be okay. (Pressfield 2003;79)

For the professional, facing resistance to work is part of the process of creating. They have developed a means of overcoming their fear and desire to avoid the initial steps toward their work. In fact, after observing Adams and spending many days in the studio, it became clear that one means of procrastinating work on a specific piece is by working on other pieces. The ritual eventually brings the artist to the point where they can work, and once they begin they have overcome the fear.

Through participant observation with several of these artists I found that their rituals are a meandering road. They can be short and be as simple as driving to Starbucks to procure a coffee, and as long as waking up in the morning, having coffee and breakfast, resting all day long to prepare the self for a hard night of performing. The more removed the art is from the influence and demands of a schedule set by a dance company or acting company, I find the more disciplined the artist must be about their time and work. Setting one's own deadlines is hard, because they are easy to ignore. When art is less social, less dependent on others, discipline is all the more important.

When I spent a few days with the painter Greg Adams, I found he did not mind when I was around during his lessons with private students or his other daily chores, but when it came to the evening around the time he expected himself to work he would politely excuse himself and I felt it was time to leave. Over the years I worked with Greg I rarely was invited to stay during the
three or four evenings a week that he worked. The one time he did invite me, he made sure to provide an easel and paints and before sitting down he made sure I was working on a project. He began just as he explained in his interview; setting up the light, testing the consistency of the oil paints and choosing brushes. Then he seated himself before his painting, pulled his spectacles down his nose and examined the place where he had most recently been working.

Other times, however, I have found that he would prepare to work in the evening so I would leave. Yet in the morning I would return and the work station would be untouched. Inquiring about this Greg would look guilty and make a statement about being too tired or make a joke about it just not being the right night, but that he would make up the time another night. This brings up many questions about the pacing of working in the arts. Sometimes the rituals and discipline does not produce the focus. Some times no matter how the artist speaks of their consistency and dedication, there are times when their devotion and inspiration to create slows or stops. How do professional artists handle the pauses and breaks in their work? Do professional artists find lack of inspiration instigates fear or that they are discouraged? Are these breaks built into the lifestyle of the artist; an expected stage of inspiration?

**Inspiration**

*It's going to happen sometimes. Despite all the good habits you've developed, the preparation rituals, the organizational tools, the techniques for scratching out pre-ideas and actual ideas, there will come a time when your creativity fails you. You stare at the canvas, the screen, the keyboard, the empty room—and it refuses to meet your eyes. It looks away as if it's ashamed of you. You may as well be painting on shards of broken glass. Your screen shows nothing but wavy lines. Your fingers slip off the keyboard, never getting traction. The room turns dark and cold, and someone is locking the door behind you.*

—Twyla Tharp
The discipline and creation of ritual plays a long-term role in the lives of the artist. It is a way of structuring the times of critical thinking and creative problem solving the imaginative and inspirational aspects of their lives. Inspiration takes place within the space that allows for the focus to happen, and when inquiring about how this transpires I received many different explanations about the way creative energy and inspiration appears. This realm of creation was presented to me by each artist as complex and partially unexplainable; “Talking about the creative process is very difficult and tricky, because part of it is unexplainable” (Morgan 2011). These are moments where everything seems to align and the process takes hold. This was expressed to me as a space that happens:

There is another aspect about space: the dark space... the cave. It is the ‘real’ space. It doesn’t matter what the external is, except that bubble is needed. Where it is happening is in that amazing place where you don’t know how, how did that arise? How does that concept that weaving happen? Weaving a ton of material together. I will go back to something I have written and I wonder where that come from. (Smith 2011)

My informants explained their inspirational phenomenon as a kind of magic, in which they feel they are being influenced by something greater or more than themselves, yet it is still a part of them. Adams illustrated his experience:

It is complicated because some of it I am not sure I know; just a kind of driving force that comes from somewhere deep down inside. Another aspect of it is a more cognizant thing, where I say, "you know you only have some many more years in your life, you better get busy now." So, there are those two things, that mysterious force that is driven by the muse, the muse is happiest when I’m doing something and then the other that is saying "hurry along you don’t have much time." It’s not just a passion; sometimes I’m tired. I am saying.... I have to look forward to doing something monotonous, but it’s necessary to finish what it is I’m doing to try to get the bigger idea across. (Adams 2011)

The imaginative space is a reality; a place-world where ideas are formulated and brought into being. This creative process brings with it fear, resistance, personal censorship, and an unexplainable force, which influences the creative activity: an ‘unknown,’ which happens
unexpectedly and makes the struggle worth all the grief. It has been explained as many different things as expressed by Smith:

It is a magical experience, every book I have started, every book that I have worked with other people on, I feel like, I can't do this, how can this come about? Then something happened I don't know how it is, what looked like a lot of separate pieces, comes together into one piece. Things that have been there all along, but they had not coalesced. It is like Michelangelo looking at the stone and he sees David and he takes away everything that is not David. (Smith 2011)

Each description of these moments gives a better understanding of how the artist themselves related to their work and the space they create in order to work productively. It is not an energy that happens all the time. Instead, it is a space that opens up when all the hard training and work suddenly has paid off.

It happens sometimes you have magic moments, where things happen on stage maybe by yourself or maybe with another person or a couple more people where you can't really explain, where something comes from somewhere that it is tricky because it becomes almost mystical sometimes. Something will happen on stage that feels so right and the people on stage know it and afterwards someone will ask you, "god, how did you get that...?" I don't know, I just did it, because I did it and it was right.... it was just absolutely right at the moment. (Morgan 2011)

This unexplainable force expressed by all of my informants came about for them at unexpected times. How do artists make sense of this phenomenon; this 'magic'? Lee explained to me how difficult it is to be a professional artist, but the best advice he had ever received was “be not the artist and let the art be itself” (2011). This shaped Lee’s mentality about how to approach his own work, a way of relinquishing control, which allows for the ‘magic’ to transpire.

When talking about this unexplainable energy, I encountered several of my informants saying that they knew it sounded crazy. The inspiration that came from deep within, and they asserted that it was in many ways beyond words. What I discovered, however, was that they did have a way to describe this energy and it took an ambiguous form; the muse. In the language of the field of art, the muse is common, but when they were speaking to me as an outsider, it was clear they
were unsure how to express the concept of a personified energy. How does the muse influence
the creative space? “The muse is as complicated in itself. There is an unknown aspect to her and
sometimes she is very present even visually in my mind and then sometimes she is just kind of
sitting there lingering in the background watching, making sure I’m doing what I am doing”
(Adams 2011). The muse for Adams has a gender, and its own identity. It has become a being
onto itself; separate from Greg, yet is inextricably linked to the imaginative space created during
work. Greg’s muse is relatable through applied categorization and social characteristics.

She is sort of the housekeeper, she will motivate me to colors, for example purchasing
colors, or to investigate colors, or she will motivate me to arrange a working order of the
things in front of me, to a kind of logical sort of way. She plays her little hand in every
little aspect kind of. Of course, it is combined with my working experience in the shop
when I was a kid. Combining that experience of practicality combined with the muse
kind of shoving things around shapes a kind of order at the painting station. (Adams
2011)

The muse takes on the role of artistic authority and the energy that transcends in the presence of
this activity creates the ‘other.’ The discipline and habits of ritual bring the focus and creates the
imaginative space for the muse to actualize ideas for the physical realm of production. The
process also goes further. The artist experiences the self as a character interacting with the muse,
but the muse is not inspiration itself. Instead, the muse energy is a tool for creating and
accessing the inner realms of experience. The muse is a part of the artist, a translator and
conductor of the craft:

First of all, connected to the performance piece there is an angel that just appeared, and it
was just very real. And that, whatever that is, a part of creating that piece and it cannot be
created without. And he/she first appeared sitting in a chair. Just like, ok there is someone
else in the room here, oh yeah, there they are. So that is part of the process, but I think I
see myself. I see what the space is going to need to look like that I am going to do this
performance in. What unfolds in my mind is, I see myself doing each part. I see
myself...what is really happening. (Smith 2011)
In a sense, the successful artist finds a way of interacting with the creative personified force and projects it into the imaginative space to channel inspiration. The artist’s identity and main self becomes the observer and the actualizing of their work is in part, done by the ‘other.’ This is a way to discern and see their work through another’s eye. The muse monitors the inner well of ideas and inspiration and is not inspiration itself. It helps formulate the abstract concepts by bringing them forward for the artist to investigate and birth into the physical works. The muse like the studio is a tool of creation. It is part of the process of manifesting the art.

The reluctance of the artists to speak to me about the muse brings forward an underlying fear of being stigmatized or viewed as crazy. The artist is walking a fine line between the social stigmas of appearing borderline schizophrenic, because their ability to be both the creator and the observer is a necessary aspect of creating. It also means the artist has a much more complex means of monitoring the self than most people.

Creative ideas do not come from the muse itself. They are parts of the artist, which have developed over a lifetime of experience. Morgan explained the development of his inspiration:

I think we all have an enormous amount of stuff going on inside of us. To me the acting process is, ‘I am going to play this guy,’ but all I have got is me, I’ve got my body, my mind and I’ve got my voice, my experiences to draw on and I have to think that we all have a lot of these parts in us, and it is finding that part of yourself that you can tap into and have the courage to reveal to an audience, sometimes it is a very unpleasant part of yourself, if you are playing someone that is a fairly ugly unsympathetic character you have to have the courage to say, ‘you know there is that part of me and I am going to expose it to an audience now....’ If you are really lucky as an actor maybe the most successful roles I have had are when I read it on the page the first time I can hear it and see it, I can see who this person is, I can hear who this person is. It doesn’t happen to me that often, and right away I know who this person is and it is much easier for me to find that part of myself and let it go. (Morgan 2011)

The awareness of drawing from personal experience is an important aspect of the creative process. It is these energies from the self that are being presented in the artist’s work; the generation of characters and images therefore are a product of reaffirming cultural ideologies and
expectations. Cindy argues, “in terms of fiction, which is different, fiction is characters that exist that have there own full being and it is like you are discovering that. Where do they come from? Well, they obviously come from our past, because we couldn’t make up a character that we have not been familiar with the pieces of... they kind of spring into existence” (Smith 2011). The means of producing new ideas and embodying a character of another comes from a collective cultural narrative and expectation. The muse plays the role of helping access previously learned knowledge and comprehending personal experience.

Not all of my informants claimed to have a muse as a separate personified energy. The energy was not ‘othered,’ instead; the self brings forth the energy needed to actualize their craft. They assert the most important part of art is the ability of the professional artist to be both the creator and the observer:

The self becomes the audience. The audience I am going to address is there in the presence. I am both the audience and the creator. That is a very important part of all art. The art is for the eye of the other and that eye of the other is in the room while I am creating. Like theater does not exist without what is called the ‘fourth wall’ which is the audience, and in writing sometimes I come across people who say they are writing just for themselves, no! You are writing for a communication. The arts are a communication. (Smith 2011)

This allows for the artist to place their work within the context of culture and create the space in which the work is supposed to be presented without actually having it done. This brings forward the concept of the stage, where all art is created to be viewed and experienced. The artist through their process must be able to predict through ‘self-othering’ how their actual audience will view the work. “...Even though you are in character, there is also your self that is kind of the third eye that is out there watching yourself, and kind of keeping an artistic policeman out there watching yourself. And again that sounds kind of bizarre” (Morgan 2011). By being both the creator and the audience, the studio space and the imagination needed to produce work that is always in the
context of the other and therefore can be thought of as a stage. The studio becomes a stage where
the artist is able to comfortably access all tools of their craft and bring it together for a kind of
communication. The artist brings the stage with them into their space as they work. This means
the act of creating becomes a performance of the artist’s constant observing the other self create.

The stage of creating becomes a consistent part of the artist's life, “It is a long ongoing
conversation. It is a relationship, like a tree not only are there different branches that I am
exploring, so not only are there different animals that I keep remaking, because it is like a series
that I keep exploring” (Morris 2011). Inspiration is contextualized to the stage space and exists
with the audience, muse, and the ‘other.’ It is not confined to the studio, and in fact:

I find that both in writing fiction and creating a performance piece, things come to me
when I am doing other things, they come when I am doing dishes or walking and I can
follow as far as that leads me, then I have to wait for the rest. There is a saying, the
unicorn is always seen from the corner of the eye. I think that is what it is, it is flitting
past when you are not really looking for it and then it comes, but once I sit down and start
putting that down, then the bubble happens and the flow and the unfolding, but than with
words, then there is always the editing, discovering, changing, and refining. (Smith 2011)

The process of creating involves different phases of production. The space has different
aspects as the artist goes through the rituals and habits of their lives. Projects have phases and
rhythms and each artist has different methods of working. For Andrea, “When I go out into the
studio, I am going to do five things, not just one thing. Basically my process is to be finishing a
sculpture, in the middle of making another sculpture and be starting another sculpture” (Morris
2011). This allows for a continuous cycle of production. When a piece comes together the muse
steps forward and miracles can happen, but this does not happen all the time. Many of my
informants referred to inspiration as a cup, which fills and drains during the process of
inspiration and production. As Lee explains, “… the usefulness of the cup is emptiness. If you
have a full cup all the time and your muse is already there all the time there is no change to
inspire new thought. You have to clean the cup over and over for your muse to want to come and sit in it. You have to drink it and take care of it” (2011). All of the informants confronted this filling and emptying of creative energy, a rhythm of discovering and a need for replenishment.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the relationship between the artist and their environment. It included the construction of physical space and investigated the imaginative space that is created while the artist is focused on their work. There needs to be more participant observation and fieldwork to complete this study, but with the data I have gathered, it is already apparent that there are distinct qualities of the creative space, which explains in what ways the artists’ space is a valuable tool for completing their work.

Through years of experience and secondary socialization in the field of art, professional artists have created unique relationships with the tools of their craft. The studio space is vital in many visible and invisible ways. It is an essential tool in the arsenal of the artist, for it protects the dreamer and allows for a safe place available to minimize distraction.

The artists dependency on their studio space has to be flexible, in order to accommodate for their lifestyle, yet it remains just as important as the brushes for painting and the clay in ceramics. It is the nature of the artistic project which ultimately determines the space that is required.

The physical space contains the tools for art, but it does not itself promote productivity or inspiration. Instead, it supports the work ethic of the artist. The most important aspect of professionalism is the personal discipline. This involves a personal awareness and a good understanding of one’s own personal rhythms, resistances, fears, and process. This not only
includes knowing when to push themselves past the feelings of resistance to sitting down and doing work, but also knowing when it is time to take breaks and allow for the replenishment of the creative well. These breaks involve taking walks, cleaning, watching movies, and so on. Each artist has their own way of filling themselves with new inspiration. There is a delicate balance that involves knowing when to take time and replenish creative energy, and when to push past procrastination.

The professional artists have developed personal discipline by identifying their own inner struggles. They have developed different rituals and habits, which are used to establish a focus. The performance of rituals alters the artist’s mindset and creates a space informants referred to as the formation of an invisible bubble. The space of the studio allows the focus to develop. A studio creates a place where the artist can separate themselves from the interruptions and distractions of their daily lives. Each informant was aware, depending on their state of mind, of what kinds of things that will interrupt their focus. Ritual and discipline are vital pieces of the professional life of the artist, because they are essential for overcoming the mundane and tedious work that needs to be done in order to finish their work.

The maintenance of healthy creative habits and personal discipline makes space for the muse to transcend and new ideas to transpire. The structuring of the artist’s life removes the obstacles enforced by resistance and allows for them to be aware of the relationship to their craft and inspiration. All of my informants discussed an unexplainable ‘magic’ that happens at unsuspecting times. Steven Pressfield expresses the relationship of an artist’s ritual and discipline to the phenomenon of ‘magic’, “...if he build it, she would come” (Pressfield 2003:64). This concept engages the more complex question of what artists feel while they are working. The more complex and unexplainable realm of creation involves the mythical presence...
of the muse. The muse energy is another tool of the artist. For some of my informants, the muse is a personified energy separate from the artist, and for others; it is energy of different inner personalities, which they draw from for acting or expressing.

The energy of the muse, once explained, brought with it another realm of the artistic process, which illuminated one of the most essential relationships between the artist, their imaginative and physical space. This is the division between the artist as the creator, and the artist as the audience. While the artist works on a project they are constantly evaluating the product. They assume the role of the creator and the audience. The self is separated and the artist is able to view the piece as they believe the audience will experience it. This division turns the creative space into a stage, where the artist is constantly observing the unfolding of their creation. The studio, as a tool, becomes the stage for cultural production, where the artist can continuously evaluate the product with a lens of cultural assumptions. Throughout the different stages of the creative process, the studio takes on different roles as a stage. These different relationships to the studio need to be investigated further. The data suggests that each part of the creative process takes on different layers of cultural logic applied by the artist to help construct their work in the context of metaphor and personal genius. They are conscious of this process and their ability to place themselves in the seat of the observer, which becomes a new realm of focus shaped by discipline.

While the artist works they are metaphorically presenting their creation to the culture, and judging it with the knowledge of cultural expectation within the realm of the field of art. Artists are in touch with the creative rhythms and find ways to remain productive by creating daily rituals. By allowing for the natural ebb and flow of inspiration the life of the artist is in many ways, rebelling against the regimented Protestant expectation of constant productivity. Investigating this relationship between the Protestant work ethic expected in the United States
and the lifestyle of the artist would be another avenue of research, because it explores the
dynamic between the subculture of artists and their position in the broader culture.

Due to the time restraint on this project I was unable to investigate many of the questions and
dynamics that were uncovered during my research. I just began to scratch the surface of the
relationship between the artist and inspiration. Among many unanswered questions we might ask
- How do artists view the passing of time while they work?

The studio is a private stage where the artist is both the observer and the creator, where they
are constantly evaluating their work through a cultural lens and awareness. Their hard work and
personal discipline opens the space where unexplainable things transpire; the muse steps off its
throne and steps forward. Miracles can happen.
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