

# Becoming an Artist: A Surprising Biographical Project

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**Abstract:** The aim of the following essay is to provide a more precise analytical insight into the development of artistic mastery and artistic identity. The professional biography of a young sculptor, told by herself, serves as the qualitative data basis. The interpretation method applied here is a variant of the so-called ‘reconstructive hermeneutics’ developed in a range of own qualitative studies. Theoretical background is Michael Polanyi’s phenomenological knowledge theory. The interpretation discovers interesting stages of the protagonist’s artistic development: hidden influences from childhood and youth, ambivalent experiences during the various studies, a surprising ‘coming out’ as an artist, a sort of ‘inauguration’ and finally a deep trust in her own artistry. The surprising result is not only a profound insight into the complex process of artistic creativity and the paradoxical becoming process of artistic identity, but also the discovery of clear limits of Polanyi’s knowledge model as it ignores the undeniable influence of biographical experience on the tacit knowing of gaining artistic mastery.

**Keywords:** Professional Artistry, Artistic Mastery, Reflection-in-Action, Intuition, The Knowledge Triangle, From-to-Structure of Perception, Recognition, Biographicity of Knowledge

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## 1. Introduction

The path to a certain professional “artistry” [17] – be it as a carpenter, as a nurse, as a teacher or as a doctor – is a complicated process. Reconstructing precisely the highly differentiated abilities of a musician or a visual artist seems to be almost hopeless. How does one ‘learn’ to become a person who convincingly sees him- or herself as an artist? And how can that been explored?

In a much-cited essay on “the pedagogical construction of learning from the perspective of biographical theory”, the Viennese social psychologist Bettina Dausien [11] recalled that more than 50 years ago the German philosopher and pedagogue Günther Buck rightly stated in his phenomenological study *Learning and Experience*: “Of all human achievements, learning seems by its nature to belong to the most hidden and unknown.” ([10], p. 11)<sup>1</sup> In fact, we experience in everyday life that we have learned something, for example riding a bicycle as a child; but the concrete learning process, i.e. the question of how we have learned to keep balance, remains largely withdrawn from direct

experience. We cannot watch the learning process. We can only reconstruct it ex post based on traces it has left:

“We learn a lot and decisive things, as one say, ‘unconsciously’, in other words: in such a way that, in principle, we cannot reflect on how the learning took place. One day we ‘can’ do something. We therefore have nothing to say about the process that led to being able to do so, because being able to do so creates the prerequisite for us to become conscious of learning.” ([10], p. 11).

The “lack of experience of the learner with regard to his/her learning” (ibid.) is irritatingly at the same time associated with a certain ‘knowledge’ about this own learning. For example, we know that we struggle to learn vocabulary or we know that we are bored of repeated etudes on the piano. But we also know that we can only learn complicated sequences of movements on the piano or violin if we have repeated them infinitely many times. “The paradoxical relationship between concealment and evidence, between know-ledge and non-knowledge” ([11], p. 156) has to do with the fact that we can ‘somehow’ perceive the difference between a beginning of learning and its result, but know almost nothing about the process that lies between these two points:

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<sup>1</sup> Translation of the original German text by the author.

“Since we don’t know what learning is as a process, we talk about learning as a process that takes place between two states of a system, the state before ‘learning’ and the state after ‘learning’. We call this specific change of state learning. This results in: the first thing we can say about ‘learning’ is that learning is an explanatory model for the observation of very specific changes and not a term with a reference range that can be defined precisely in terms of content. And the observation conditions to be taken into account are anything but simple.” ([22], pp. 11 f.).

So if ‘learning’ is already so difficult to decipher, how should the special competence or the intuitive skills of artists be identified? In fact, representatives of phenomenological learning theories have come closest to approaching the emergence of subtle professional artistry (representative: [17, 18]. Interesting is, for example, the tiered concept of the American nursing scientist Patricia Benner in her prominent professional study *From Novice to Expert* [8]. The theory of the “reflective practitioner”, which the American urban planner and philosopher Donald Schön [24, 25] presented, is also surprisingly successful. His considerations, as those of Benner or Neuweg, are based on the classic study on the meaning of “tacit knowing” by Michael Polanyi [19]. In his concept of the *reflective practitioner*, Schön places reflexivity in the focus of his considerations on skills in professional practice - albeit a very self-willed form of reflexivity.

In his observations, professional competence has to do with the ability to cope with new, unknown and risky professional situations ([25], p. 22). “Spontaneous knowledge” is hidden in this ability. Schön calls it “knowing-in-action” – a kind of knowledge that is based on many years of practical experience, without those affected being able to say why and how they know what they are doing. An experienced doctor, for example, intuitively recognises an illness when a patient with certain symptoms enters the room, without being able to describe exactly where this spontaneous ‘inspiration’ actually comes from. Examples of intuitive actions can also be found in nursing practice. A nurse follows the impulse to enter a sick room, in which exactly at that moment a patient is suffering from severe shortness of breath, but could not ring the bell. The reasons why situational actions are not consciously accessible can usually not be described. In the situation of current action, implicitly available knowledge remains largely hidden ([25], pp. 26 ff.).

However, experienced practitioners can still manage to react flexibly to specific professional situations. This “reflection-in-action” [24] is a phenomenon that is particularly familiar to artists, e.g. musicians or painters: improvisation in a jazz combo depends on such reflection in actu. The spontaneous choice of a shade in the process of painting, the sculptor’s feeling for the hardness of the stone during processing - all these intuitive reactions represent the phenomenon of reflection-in-action. Exactly this is then no longer mere ‘not knowing’. Rather, it is what Polanyi calls “tacit knowing” ([19], pp. 4 ff.), in other words: “implicit

know-ledge”. Of course, there remains an indefinite uncertainty, which is also reflected in his cautious dictum: “I shall consider human knowledge by starting from the fact that we can know more than we can tell.” ([19], p. 4).

And, of course, it is right first of all that we cannot talk about everything we ‘know’. For example, as mentioned earlier, we know we can ride a bike, but there is not much we can say about how we learned it. Or we know that we have seen a certain person before, but we can’t say exactly why we recognise her or what looks familiar about her face. There is this fundamental experience in almost everything we learn. We know that we have learned something, but we know little about how the learning itself looked like. Something remains, as it were, that has not yet been told.

One problem, however, is that we can rightly get the impression that what has not yet been told is indeed the ‘core area’ of what we are actually interested in. It is undoubtedly Polanyi’s great merit that he sensitively tries to explore the path from ‘not-knowing’ to knowing and thereby discovers the ‘model’ of a “*from-to-structure (of perception)*” (see below), which could open the door to the tacit dimension. A possibly indispensable paradox remains that this ‘model’ notoriously adheres to a certain difference between knowledge and ‘not-yet-knowing’.

The following ‘experiment’ is an attempt with a double punch: The interview with a young artist about her complicated way of building artistic identity serves as a cautious approach to what has been ‘not yet told’. At the same time, it is intended to make it clear that Polanyi’s ‘model’ (which will be developed later) remains incomplete if we do not link it to the temporal dimension of biographical experience.

## 2. Becoming an Artist

The interview which this essay is based on is not a ‘biographical-narrative interview’ [26, 27]. The definition of “*problem-centered interview*” [28] would probably be more appropriate.<sup>2</sup> The topic is actually “*becoming an artist*”. As a result, the interviewee tells long sequences in a mono-logistic manner and is seldom interrupted by the interviewer, but the focus of the narrative is not her biography, but her life as an artist.

At the time of the interview the protagonist is 34 years old. She is a trained artist with a focus on sculpture and lives with her partner and their daughter in a major European city. The narrator and the interviewer know each other well. The interview was conducted online and lasted about two hours. In the following, selected “core points”<sup>3</sup> of the narrative are

2 Nevertheless, the focused utterances of the protagonist are predominantly narrative profiled because they are based on the process of ‘*becoming an artist*’.

3 “*Core points*” usually represent, on the one hand, aspects of the internal ‘logic’ of the investigated case and, on the other hand, the thematic context that determines the respective research question – in this case the question of “*becoming an artist*”. For the transcript notation, a slightly smoothed version of the text presentation is chosen in order to increase readability. This approach is part of the ‘re-constructive hermeneutics’ developed in my own research team (cf.

interpreted. In doing so, implicit reference is made to the theoretical framework of a reconstruction of “artistry” [17, 18] and to Polanyi’s ‘model’ of *tacit knowing* [20]. Intention is a deeper understanding of what becoming and being an artist could mean. The interview begins with a narration request.

### 2.1. Formative Impressions During Childhood and Youth

I<sup>4</sup>: “Somehow it’s about your path to becoming an artist. It would be nice if you just try to remember when and how you encountered ‘arts’ in quotation marks. Because of me, start with your childhood. When and how, for example, was painting beautiful, interesting or important for you? Try to just remember.” (1, 1-5)<sup>5</sup>

The interviewer’s request is cautious, almost a little tentative. The modal particle “*somehow*” introduces this vagueness. The almost exaggerated politeness phrase “*it would be nice if you...*” and the relativising withdrawals (“*if you just try*”, “*... ‘arts’ in quotation marks*”, “*because of me*”, “*when and how*”) reinforce this effect. It seems as if the interviewer wants to keep the narrator’s memory process as open as possible and not to steer it in a certain direction through hard guidelines. There were probably preliminary arrangements that had to do with the definition of the topic (“*becoming an artist*”). And perhaps the interviewer is keen on mitigating these preliminary arrangements and to create a kind of ‘authentic initial situation’ for the interview. The reference to the trivial memory of childish painting appears of course as an ‘interviewer’s trick’ and seems a little bit artificial.

N<sup>3</sup>: “Well, even without us doing an interview, I’ve often asked myself the question, so to speak, and that’s why it’s not something I’ve never tried to remember, but actually tried many times. And I actually can’t remember it. That’s actually the exciting thing which I’ve somehow found out for years: that if I think about when art came into my life or something, then it’s first something from the outside somehow. So, of my paintings, my children’s paintings, although some of them were saved by my grandma [...] that I made them, I have zero memory.” (1, 6-14).

The narrator ‘ratifies’ her willingness to narrate by letting the artificial prompting impulse come to nothing (“*Well, even without us doing an interview, I’ve often asked myself the question, so to speak ...*”). In doing so, she also implicitly confirms that there must have been prior arrangements because she feels ‘remembered’, so to speak, of her own memories (“*and that’s why it’s not something I’ve never tried to remember*”). Indeed, it does not appear to be the first time she has faced this problem (“*which I’ve somehow found out for years*”). The paradox (“*That’s actually the exciting thing*”) about this memories is the fact that she simply doesn’t have any (“*So, of my paintings... that I made them, I*

*have zero memory*”). What is left is a kind of heuristic ‘memory theory’ (“*that if I think about when art came into my life or something, then it’s first something from the outside somehow*”). The impulse for art came “*from the outside*” in her life. What that really means in concrete terms, she explains in a following sequence:

N: “Well, exactly, the fact is: I remember that I’ve *seen* art as basic impression. So, actually, that’s the first thing I remember. And the first thing I really remember is Paula Becker-Modersohn<sup>6</sup>. Because my parents loved her pictures, liked them; because my city loved them, liked them; because basically she was a popular artist in my home region, I think, who was shown to friends. We went to Worpswede, for example, this is part of it. But I think these are pictures that I have, for example, I don’t remember them in the museum or in the Barkenhoff or something like that. I remember the garden or something completely different. But I remember them as pictures that hung in our home as little postcards or little pictures or calendars and which perhaps were actually art that I could understand even as a child. So, where people were on it, where children were on it and why I also understood early: it is something that you can have, because my parents liked it, or that it is something they loved, that they could appreciate. Somehow that’s the first.” (1, 20-34).

It is almost touching how the narrator describes her first childlike encounter with art as something very personal, almost intimate. It’s about “*Paula Becker-Modersohn*” and her pictures, which she loves because the family loves them (“*because my parents loved her pictures, liked them*”), as they are part of the home culture (“*because my city loved them, liked them; because basically she was a popular artist in my home region... who was shown to friends*”). This sequence is a fitting proof of Bourdieu’s thesis [9] that ‘cultural capital’ is primarily incorporated *en passant* and runs through a common practice that is exercised by relevant others and requires a certain continuity and duration. It is not about hidden cultural-educational ‘training’ (“*these are pictures... I don’t remember them in the museum or in the Barkenhoff or something like that*”), but about the ‘natural’ and everyday experience in the familiar environment (“*I remember them as pictures, that hung in our home as little postcards or little pictures or calendars*”). And the pictures convince her as art that she “*could understand even as a child*” (“*where people were on it, where children were on it*”), because they were obviously paintings that one could love and appreciate (“*that it is something that you can have, because my parents liked it, or that it is something they loved, that they could appreciate*”). The first encounter with art is very concrete, and it is not an educational experience that is linked to sophisticated cognitive insights, but rather to deep feelings of closeness and appreciation. The aspect “*from the outside*” of the previous segment is nothing external for the

[2], [6], [7]).

4 I = Interviewer; N = Narrator.

5 Transcript: page 1, lines 1-5. Like all following interview quotations translation from the German original by the author.

6 Apart from the name of this famous modern artist and her social environment (Worpswede, Barkenhoff etc.), name and place information within this text is anonymised or masked.

narrator. It is something that, through the loving appreciation of others, pushes itself into her own horizon of attention (*"I remember I've seen art as basic impression"*). To confirm this important feeling, she remembers a contrasting example from her elementary school days:

"Otherwise, the feedback on my art at school was rather poor, so to speak. I have, in all subjects in elementary school, we had no grades, but assessments or, so to speak, grades in words. I got the best grade everywhere [...]. Funny enough, only in the textile design, I had the worst grade in that." (2, 8-13).

From the school's point of view, she portrays herself as an 'artistic dope' with some self-irony. Not only does the school fail to appreciate her "art" (*"Otherwise, the feedback on my art at school was rather poor, so to speak"*), *"Funny enough"*, she gets the "worst grade" for *"textile design"* – an art style that is one of her most successful forms of production today.

For the following years of her childhood she will remember that 'seeing art' has deepened. During a family stay in Scandinavia for almost two years, she has the opportunity to get to know various museums more intensively. In retrospect, she perceives the visits as a playful approach to art, the museums themselves, as she puts it, *"as a place to live"*, as rooms full of atmosphere (*"Well, I think so, the museum's atmosphere, it got me early, somehow it interested me, somehow, said something to me or did something with me, just to accept that it was something valuable"*). However, there is no memory of the interest in making art by herself. That changes at the end of puberty:

N: "And the first time in my life, which is actually totally crazy, where I had the feeling that I do something or I am – do I make art or do I do something for others... Well, then I was already 17 or 18. [...] So, or no, I don't have the feeling of making art, but that I want to do something with my hands and don't even want to think about what makes sense of it, so to speak. It doesn't make any sense, but the act of doing it satisfies me. I packed my entire closet with wallpaper paste and paper maché. [...] And then friends of mine came along and they both said: 'What are you doing there? Are you crazy? What is that?' I said: 'I don't really know what that is either. Somehow I felt like I had to do this now. I felt like doing something like that.' [...] I had to do it, although it makes no sense. [...] But that was just something I really remember." (4, 12-23).

The beginning of this narrative segment marks a turning point (*"And the first time in my life..."*). The narrator qualifies this incision as *"actually totally crazy"*. It is associated with a *"feeling"* that is obviously still extremely diffuse, but at the same time appears significant (*"I do something or I am - do I make art or do I do something for others"*). The repeatedly used modal particle *"something"* and the noticeable repetition of the verbs *"do"* or *"make"* indicates two aspects: uncertainty and departure. It seems to be a kind of *'biographical inauguration'*. The strange phrase *"I do ... or I am"* is vaguely reminiscent of Descartes *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Does the narrator mean

*facio ergo sum* (I do/make, therefore I am)? In any case, "doing"/"making" plays a major role in the following (*"I don't have the feeling of making art, but that I want to do something with my hands and don't even want to think about what makes sense, so to speak [...] but the act of doing it satisfies me"*). It is undoubtedly astonishing that the narrator uses the present tense and not the past tense throughout the first part of this memory. The impression arises that she puts herself in the shoes of the situation at the time – definitely a symptom of the scene's continuing 'inauguration character'.

The fact that she then 'wraps up' her closet with wallpaper paste and paper maché may be reminiscent of the *"junk sculptures"* by the Viennese Actionists from 1962<sup>7</sup>, but it appears to be of secondary importance. It is undoubtedly more important that she 'ratifies' her 'act of creation' in front of members of her own peer group (*"I don't really know what that is either. Somehow I felt like I have to do this now."*). She doesn't seem to mind that she is considered *"crazy"* (*"What are you doing there? Are you crazy? What is that?"*). She *"had to do it, although it makes no sense"*, and the situation is inscribed in her memory (*"But that was just something I really remember."*). It is characteristic of the narrator that she can switch back and forth between a gesture of completely serious madness and aloof self-irony. However, she also reflects on why it is almost impossible for her to choose art as a course of study. On the occasion of her visit to a university of applied sciences for *"Interior Design"* – before graduation – a scene stuck in her mind.

## 2.2. Ambivalent Encounters During the Studies

N: "I remember a professor who said, who told us, that somehow they are doing a course like that: they paint and paint and paint. And in the back is the shredder and everything is immediately shredded away again, what you have done. Because you have to learn, so to speak, to do and then not to hold on to it, not to become fond of what you have done. Somehow that really impressed me. I still remember that. So I said, 'yes, somehow, I could imagine that.' And I just didn't dare to do that. I could have gone there too or I could have found out more. I didn't dare. Somehow there were no role models at all, no idea at all. I really, actually... I didn't know anyone who was not just not an artist, but was anything else than a professor." (6, 16-25).

In this sequence, too, the motive of the unexpected, the crazy first comes to the fore (*"paint and paint and paint... and everything is immediately shredded away again"*), practicing the 'making' and letting it go again immediately (*"not to hold on to it, not to become fond of what you have done"*). That was exactly what she seemed to be fascinated by (*"Somehow that really impressed me... I could imagine that"*). But the fascination is not strong enough. Twice she

7 At the end of May 1962, Adolf Frohner, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch and Josef Dvorak walled themselves up in a cellar and linked the production of "junk sculptures" with the manifesto "The Blood Organ". The "tearing up a lamb", which had also been announced, was prevented by the police.

emphasises that she *“didn’t dare”*. The reason: There was a lack of *“role models”* and a sparkling *“idea”*. In a drastic exaggeration of the experiences from her own academic family milieu, she supposedly knew no one... who was *“anything else than a professor”*. In the linguistically incorrect double negation before this statement (*“not just not an artist”*) there is again comedic joke and that recurring subtle self-irony.

Of course there were other role models. She herself mentions the *‘cleaning lady’* of the parents’ household, whom she loved. She even recalls the figure of the *“player’s wife”*, a position in life that she, as a soccer fool, does not find completely absurd. Finally, she names a close family friend who, as a cultural manager in a medium-sized town, was undoubtedly familiar with art. Her chosen subjects at university, however, were education, sociology and Scandinavian studies – close to the academic milieu of the family, but also too familiar and therefore not really challenging, so that dropping out after a year was not surprising. Astonishingly, the narrator does not perceive the design studies that she then took up as a *‘bridge’* to art:

N: “And then I did this design degree, and for someone like me that was, let’s put it that way: it was a really good introduction. First of all, it was an incredibly intense time, where we did an incredible amount of work and learned a lot because it was fully school based. So, with everything that is said in art, this school based learning, in art it often doesn’t work. But it’s not bad at all if people somehow learn some kind of craft beforehand. And I think I actually learned a craft there. And that was nothing with my hands in that case. But it was, so to speak, the craft to structure oneself. I actually learned that there, I think. And to give these structures a format as well, so be it that I’ve learned graphical things; be it that I’ve learned to use the computer somehow; [...] Be it, yes, like finishing projects, ending things, somehow, yes, I don’t know, something like that... Well, I think in this whole area, I kind of... get it done in time, to be able to calculate how much work something is going to be, how much time something is going to take or something, that sort of thing. It all sounds a bit boring at first for such an expensive course or something. But I believe that today it is one of my skills ... I can rely on myself.” (10, 32-11, 17).

The term that the narrator focuses on for the experiences in her design studies is surprisingly *“craft”* (*“I think I actually learned a craft there”*). And she does not associate *“craft”* with the specific use of the hands (*“that was nothing with my hands in that case”*) nor with *‘handicrafts’* as the organic step to art. She regards the ability to *“structure oneself”* as a *“craft”*. And this includes the organisation of content, obligations, designs, of a working day and also the time management in everyday student life (that means *“to give these structures a format”*: *“be it that I’ve learned graphical things, be it that I’ve learned to use the computer”* ... *finishing projects ... ending things somehow ... get it done in time*: in other words *“the craft to structure oneself”*). The course turns out to be an excellent *“introduction”* (*“and for someone like me ... let’s put it that way: it was a really good*

*introduction”*). And the result is not just a bachelor’s degree, but a *‘school-leaving certificate’* in the deeper sense (*“I can rely on myself.”*). And when she speaks of *“introduction”*, of course, she anticipates that the path will continue.

N: “And, yes, I still did not really have the idea of studying art. This design study was art enough for me. And only when I was in the exam for my design degree, in the bachelor’s exam, when they all looked at me with such question marks in their eyes: what is she actually doing? One of them said: ‘What is that supposed to be? Well, it’s somehow not a design. Do you want to be a designer? Or would you perhaps rather be a philosopher or an artist?’ And then I somehow thought, I can’t just leave it like that [...] I said: ‘Yes, I do want to study art.’ And then I tend to feel a bit committed. Because I felt the pressure of being more concrete. And the only artist ... really, I didn’t know anyone at all. The only I mentioned was Egon Gurk.<sup>8</sup> And I really don’t appreciate his work. But that was somehow the only one I knew. And then I said: ‘Yes, I’m going to study with Egon Gurk.’ And in fact I have ... and I have to say quite honestly, this is actually the greatest mystery of all ... I have been accepted into this art academy.” (13, 12-28).

Once again, characteristic of this sequence is the self-ironic gesture of the *‘anti-heroine’*, the deliberate understatement. To a certain extent, the narrator remains in a temporary state of *‘art distantness’* (*“I still did not really have the idea of studying art”*). The use of the fashionable phrase *“not really”* plays with the possibility of a change in meaning. Within the semantic horizon of the *‘not entirely’* lies a trace of *‘possibly maybe’*. The little *‘exam story’* creates the prerequisites for the narrator’s at least formal change in attitude to art: When the examiner asked whether she would *“perhaps rather be a philosopher or an artist”*, she replies: *“Yes, I do want to study art.”* And here, too, the use of the word is not accidental: in *“perhaps rather”* a *‘bridge of meaning’* is constructed that can *‘heal’* the derogatory statement that her work is *“somehow not a design”*. Since the situational decision does not, of course, bring about any real change in inner conviction, the narrator gets involved in a sort of *‘trajectory’* (*“Because I felt the pressure of being more concrete.”*). The follow-up sequence, built like a *‘farce’*, about the only known artist, whose work she – absurdly – *“really [doesn’t] appreciate”*, finds its solution in the completely incomprehensible fact of the actual admission to the art academy (*“... and I have to say quite honestly, this is actually the greatest mystery of all ... I have been accepted into this art academy.”*). The talent of being an *‘anti-heroine’* is evidenced by the course of events. But the *“mystery”* of the amazing process still needs to be resolved:

N: “But, yes, well, I have to thank Barbara Massiani<sup>9</sup>, my artistic professor, all my life. And I think, I was only accepted because of my innocence and because perhaps I still might not have appeared naïve. And my innocence included a certain ignorance that it is difficult to get into an art academy.

8 A representative of occasionally criticised contemporary art.

9 An internationally well known contemporary artist.

I really didn't know this. Apart from the fact that I noticed how nervous all the other applicants are around me, I didn't even know what an exclusive matter this actually was. And because I didn't treat it as such, I think, Barbara liked that. That I just got there with my more or less interesting junk [...] And I also have to say that my entrance exam, the work that I actually did, which had nothing to do with my design studies, was not bad either. I still think it today [...] I wasn't submissive. I also didn't know who my professor really was, didn't know that she was a famous artist. Or rather, I didn't know that famous artists were people to be adored. So, I think it was all easy, that was the reason why I was taken and that was my luck." (13.34-14.15).

After all, the admission to the art academy does not seem so completely inexplicable. An apparently effective 'mixture' of habitually disguised "innocence"/"ignorance" (*"I was only accepted because of my innocence and because perhaps I still might not have appeared naïve"*) and 'spontaneous matter-of-factness' (*"I wasn't submissive"*) are the basis of success. Indeed, she is not "nervous" (*"Apart from the fact that I noticed how nervous all the other applicants are around me ..."*). She is not aware of the exclusivity of the situation – a reason that makes her impartiality understandable (*"I didn't even know what an exclusive matter this actually was"*). She didn't know anything about the art business, which was good for her self-confidence (*"I also didn't know who Barbara really was, didn't know that she was a famous artist."*). In the end, she also succeeds in completing the final art work on the entrance examination (*"wasn't bad either. I still think it today"*), so that – viewed realistically – the acceptance seems plausible (*"that was the reason why I was taken, and that was my luck"*).

The ability to be ignorant and yet not appear naïve without making any effort is, however, also a 'capital' that should not be underestimated. Anyone who, as the narrator ironically notes in an earlier sequence, knows nobody who was "anything else than a professor", of course has 'social' and 'cultural capital' [9] that can also be connected to an art university. Nevertheless, with this story she touches on a topic that will accompany her in the following years: the great inner distance to the 'field of art' with increasing certainty of being an artist. She will discuss this paradox with artist peers over and over again, and she will not resolve it for the time being (*"Yes, yes, well, I am not one of them. I always had the feeling that I don't do it like them. [...] I don't talk the way artists talk. I'm not an artist like that, because I see how artists are, and I'm not like that. I was friends with artists who liked me, we liked each other, but I was never like them."*). In spite of everything, how does this growing 'intuition' of being an artist come about?

### 2.3. 'Coming out' as an Artist

N: "So, after Ruth's birth, I unpacked my sewing machine and started sewing at home. And then somehow something came about that was interesting, I think, I noticed that myself straight away. The very first things may not have been like that at all. But interestingly, everything I did in the

beginning, during those months of Ruth's being a baby, was new. I actually imitated art there. That's when I actually described how I see art. I used textiles, I picked out pictures that I like, that impress me or that are from art history, that are art, and I 'made them myself' in quotation marks. So, I took the canvas and cut it out... cut it out and ironed the pictures on it.<sup>10</sup> And I made great art myself by simply doubling their art. For example, much later for me it was as if I had made a friend when I saw that Bob Rosenberg<sup>11</sup> had copied a lot of great art using his stupid technique. Or stupid, I like that, or kind of like that, exactly. It was just like that, I didn't even have to think about it anymore. I just did that and [...] did what I wanted. And then I started working more freely with the sewing machine. And then I moved into a studio outside of the academy. Did that there, produced a lot, did a lot. And it was in general ... Well, on the one hand there was actually a completely different reaction immediately, people who took it seriously, who found it interesting, who somehow found it good, found it new. Because it was something that you actually hadn't seen before. And then there were also people who thought it was stupid. And for the first time ever, I didn't care. It isn't there to please you or to be good either, it is just there. And it was like authentic that it was so easy for me to get my diploma. Of course, I was excited because I hate to talk in front of people. But I wasn't afraid of failing at all. I wasn't at all afraid of getting a B, which is the other word for failure at the academy." (18, 17-19, 9).

And of course she gets an 'A'. But that is completely irrelevant to what actually happens. After the birth of her daughter, she "started sewing at home". Even "at home" seems provocative; "sewing" appears completely absurd because it threatens to fix her existence as a 'housewife'. But her experience is totally different: With the gain of a fully recognised 'natural' status, namely being a mother, her identity as an artist also seems to grow (*"And then somehow something came about that was interesting ..."*) Being a mother gives her the chance to take a different – more or less 'proactive' – perspective on art (*"I actually imitated art there. That's when I actually described how I see art."*). She frees herself from "expected expectations"<sup>12</sup>, that is, from the subtle demands of the 'art field' as to how an artist should be, and simply 'copies' images that she likes (*"And I've made great art myself by simply doubling their art."*). In doing so, she symbolically wins "a friend" in "Bob Rosenberg" because he plagiarises art

10 The application of textile images, which are taken from 'classic' models, onto a textile or leather base is a completely new technique developed by the narrator herself in the field of sculpture.

11 A masked 'star artist' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

12 The term "expected expectation" (*"Erwartungserwartung"*) comes from Niklas Luhmann's systems theory [16]. It clarifies the need to reduce (double) contingent action decisions in social situations. Actions are contingent because there are always several options to be considered. They are "doubly" contingent as there are always others involved in the actions who have their own options. Expected expectations reduce the contingency pressure because they precisely take into account the fact that other actors involved in the action process have expectations as well. But they also create permanent problem pressure to assume doubly contingent expectations.

in his own way as she does (*"For example, much later for me it was as if I had made a friend when I saw that Bob Rosenberg had copied a lot of great art using his stupid technique. Or stupid, I like that ..."*). The 'sisterly' criticism of the *"stupid technology"*, which she actually *"like[s]"*, shows a certain warmth and closeness. She is not isolated in the alien 'art field'. There are *"friends"*.

And precisely this experience has still another social basis. The narrator is perceived with her new productivity. She receives spontaneous recognition (*"on the one hand, there was actually a completely different reaction immediately, that is, people who took it seriously, who found it interesting, who somehow found it good, found it new. Because it was something that you actually hadn't seen before"*). However, she also receives negative reactions (*"And then there were also people who thought it was stupid."*). Only – and this also seems to be a new quality – she doesn't mind (*"And for the first time ever, I didn't care."*). The almost defiant formulation to a fictional critic (My work *"isn't there to please you or to be good either, but it's just there."*) confirms the certainty and authenticity of her 'being an artist' (*"And it was like authentic, that it was so easy for me to get my diploma [...] I wasn't afraid of failing at all."*). At exactly this point in time, she also leaves the production site *"at home"* and moves into her own studio (*"And then I started working more freely with the sewing machine. And then I moved into a studio outside ... produced a lot, did a lot."*). So at the same time she has become an artist 'institutionally' and 'publicly' either.

#### 2.4. 'Inauguration': Gaining Artistic Authenticity

In the second half of the interview, the protagonist speaks of the *"narratives that I created in the course of my artistic work"* – 'narratives' of her production as a meaningful metaphor for the structure of her work as the stories of artistic creation are noticeably biographically 'coloured', as it were. They fall back on experience. Perhaps this becomes more understandable in the way she prepares a particular exhibition:

N: "I was thinking, what should I actually do in this room in Rhinetown, which is so difficult, which is so present. Where can I actually show art? The floor is beautiful, there are old shelves with history. Where can I actually show art? And the moment when I was thinking about this was one afternoon when I was hungry at the pizzeria 'Gambino' in a parish three streets away from my studio. And sitting there, I looked at the ceiling and the ceiling decoration of this pizzeria and thought: 'Well, of course, I have to present my work on the ceiling. If there is no space on the floor and on the walls, then on the ceilings. Just like every pizzeria that still wants to put in some decoration, but has its tables downstairs and something else on the walls.' And that's not an intellectual thought. It's easy, that's when the inspiration came, that stupid word. so to speak. Then this idea just came up. And then I thought about pizzerias and thought about decoration, about the will to create. [...] And, yes, when I was thinking about pizzerias, I was thinking about 'Antonio'... been thinking

about what it means to make a pizzeria my home, that 'Antonio' is part of my own story even though 'Antonio' was suddenly gone. And what that means when 'Antonio' is gone and then a discotheque, 'Crain', moves in, which for all my current friends who have something to do with my hometown, nobody knows 'Antonio', everyone knows 'Crain', the discotheque. And that's the same room. [...] Well, these are just the kind of thoughts that I have or something that I disclose because I think these are actually the thoughts that are interesting. And then I called my exhibition in Rhinetown 'Antonio/Crain'." (20, 18-21, 10).

When planning her exhibition in Rhinetown, the artist included the space from the outset, which is in fact an old vegetable shop that has changed into an exhibition location (*"The floor is beautiful, there are old shelves with history. Where can I actually show art?"*). The protagonist gives the answer to this question with a little story: A stay in the pizzeria *"Gambino"* leads to the inspection of the ceiling decoration so typical for pizzerias (*"Well, of course, I have to present my work on the ceiling. If there is no space on the floor and on the walls, then on the ceilings. Just like every pizzeria that still wants to put in some decoration, but has its tables downstairs and something else on the walls."*). With this *"inspiration"*, another association comes to mind: *"Antonio"*, that friendly Italian in her hometown, in whose restaurant she felt 'at home' as a child (*"about what it means to make a pizzeria my home"*), which at some point disappeared without explanation (*"even though Antonio was suddenly gone"*) and whose restaurant has now become a disco called *"Crain"*. Current friends in her hometown have no memory of the pizzeria (*"nobody knows 'Antonio', everyone knows 'Crain', [...] And that's the same room"*). The perceptible melancholy is, however, 'reversed' in the exhibition label *"Antonio/Crain"* in a double sense: it disappears in the situational artistic arrangement, and it is preserved in her story at the same time.

It seems interesting that in many of her exhibitions, a biographical motif determines the title. In fact, her sculptures often 'tell' stories from her everyday life, scenes of political events that affect her, spaces and locations of her biography and, time and again, important biographical developments. The narrator's disposition to artistic mastery is still unresolved. This becomes clearer in a dialogue sequence with the interviewer:

N: "I always don't want to have to do anything. I don't want to be forced to do something. Like 'Karl' in a famous German children's book by Gisela Draxler<sup>13</sup>. [...] And then, when I've done which I was not forced to do, I think: 'Oh, no, what now?' And I love that. Now I sew the left-overs. All the rubbish that is lying around, I now sew it back into a picture. They are sometimes shit, sometimes particularly good. But I love sewing up the garbage most of all. Because nothing is really expected there. There's nothing which must be ... Although that's not true either. Because sometimes I do cut a bit 'cause it's so difficult to

13 An anonymised prominent German children's book author.

sew or 'cause I don't like it." [...].

I: "In recent years I have thought about this implicit knowledge that you need when you do things perfectly, that you need for professional skills, when you develop or something. It seems much more important than the explicit knowledge sometimes. Or at least it is the basis for the fact that even the explicit can become something whole at all. Do you see the chance to get a little closer to that, to get or describe what I call 'intuition' in some way in your production process?"

N: "Well, I believe that a lot of what looks to you from the outside like implicit knowledge, so to speak, is also explicit knowledge for me, albeit not always consciously. In that I know about experiences with the material, how a certain material behaves when I do this or that. So, as it were, I have ... There are scraps lying around everywhere, and there are these snippets of cloth. And sometimes I have to try a little, because that's a new scrap of fabric or something. But, of course, I also have a lot of knowledge about it: If I do this or that now, if I now take this or that speed when sewing, then this and that will happen. There are a lot of things in it that I think about doing – obviously acquired through experience – which I can now use as available knowledge. It's not an intuitive feeling, but by now I know that. I know that in the end something comes out of it. Or I know I have confidence in myself. [...] I don't know whether I can really deal with the word 'intuition'. Because for me it's more like this: I have a spontaneous trust in my own mastery. So, it's more like having confidence that it will work out in the end." (25, 10-26, 33).

The topic of the mastery begins in a way 'not really seriously' ("don't want to have to do anything ... don't want to be forced to do something"). Gisela Draxler's stories about 'Karl' are the model – again a reminiscence of her childhood. The happy sewing "leftovers" also have something of the free play of children ("All the rubbish that is lying around, I now sew it back into a picture."). The desire to deal with the blurring, the 'fuzziness' of the material ("rubbish"), and the apparent lack of plan of the practical approach, testify to the trust in her own skill. Especially when the risk of failure is allowed ("They are sometimes shit, sometimes particularly good."), creativity increases ("Because nothing is really expected there. There's nothing which must be...").

This is where the interviewer intervenes. He obviously has a thematic interest, which is touched on by the narrator's descriptions ("In recent years I have thought about this implicit knowledge that you need when you do things perfectly"). And he kind of offers her to apply his conceptual ideas about "this implicit knowledge" to her experience as an artist ("Or at least it is the basis for the fact that even the explicit can become something whole"). He is sensitive enough to include the narrator as a knowing actor in his 'research process' ("Do you see the chance to get a little closer to that, to get or describe what I call 'intuition' in your production process?"). The term "intuition" comes up, which is so central to Polanyi's theory of knowledge [20].

The narrator first takes the 'drama' out of the situation

("Well, I believe that a lot of what looks to you from the outside like implicit knowledge, so to speak, is also explicit knowledge for me, albeit not always consciously") and describes once again in more detail how her "available know-ledge" is built up ("If I do this or that now, if I now use this or that speed while sewing, then this and that will happen."). And then she explicitly defends herself against the term "intuition" ("This is not an intuitive feeling...", "I don't know whether I really can deal with the word 'intuition'") and instead chooses the terms "confidence" or "trust" ("so it's more like having confidence that it will work out in the end"). In fact, "intuition" conveys the idea of an – if one will – vague goal. As already mentioned, Polanyi speaks of a "from-to-structure" of every perception or learning process ([20], pp. 29 ff.). The protagonist, on the other hand, seems to love the freedom and lack of direction in 'making', and this is based on the trust that something will be done "in the end". The tension between pleasure in the provisional character of her work and "spontaneous trust in [her] own mastery" is reminiscent of that 'biographical inauguration situation', the "first time in [her] life", where the production of a "junk sculpture" led to the contrasting experience of 'uncertainty' and 'departure'. Since then, her life time has doubled. Artistic maturity and deep trust in her own art are evidence of a highly interesting and complex learning path, a kind of 'life narrative'. What still needs explanation – given her emphasised distance to the 'field of art' – is the topic of 'recognition' of her own work.

## 2.5. Art as a 'Narrative': Building Artistic Mastery

N: "I found it very interesting when Fred<sup>14</sup> was in the studio or so. [...] Well, first we just having a chat. And then he asked me a bit about things and stuff like that. And he likes, how I talk about it or so. [...] And then somehow he said: 'Well, yes, it's always interesting for the buyer that you can sort of getting a piece somehow ...' I didn't really understand it at first. But in the end he wanted to say that it is also interesting for the buyer, and perhaps the most interesting thing, to buy art in such a way that you can buy a part of a large whole. Being part of a Great Narrative, so to speak. I think that's probably how he sees it himself when he's selling his art. But in that sense he also agreed to that, yes, that it's obviously a kind of art making that I'm doing as well. And not a little job here and a little job there or something. But that somehow it all belongs together. And he could plausibly feel it that way, and that's how it is." (28), 17-30).

One could interpret this sequence as a description of a kind of 'knightly accolade'. The 'master' is admitting his 'apprentice' to the group of 'consecrated', who can combine a 'narrative' with their art ("that it's obviously a kind of art making that I'm doing as well"). But this "consecration" initially contradicts the profanity of the scenery. Even if the first sentence ("I found it very interesting when Fred was in

14 An internationally well known sculptor (name is anonymized), who was one of her influential teachers.

the studio”) raises expectations, the “or so” at the end questions the weight of the announcement. The description of the progress confirms the incidental (“first we just having a chat”, “asked me a bit”, “how I talk about it or so”). The surprising introduction of the “buyer” implicitly even brings the art market into discussion and apparently demystifies the ‘consecration idea’.

Then, of course, the ‘purchase act’ is reinterpreted. It mutates into participating in a “Great Narrative” (“Being part of a Great Narrative...”). The purchase of the individual sculpture does not refer to the “buyer” (and his purchasing power), rather to the entirety of the work and its significance (that one “can buy a part of a larger whole”). That means, the act of purchase is a sort of a recognition of the art and the artist. The purchased work has its symbolic value<sup>15</sup> only in relation to the artist’s overall work (“I think that’s probably how [the famous colleague] sees it himself when he’s selling his art”). The paradox remains that the “consecration” of the entire work – at least in late modern capitalist societies – requires purchase, or more precisely: it only functions through purchase. After all, this – at least as a rule – presupposes the “Great Narrative” of the entire work. And that certainly applies to the narrator’s self-image (“he could plausibly feel it that way, and that’s how it is”). The subtle recognition is ‘ratified’ by herself.

As expected at the beginning, does that mean that the ‘not yet told’ has already been said? Do we really know how a person ‘learned’ to be an artist? We understand that there are different stages of experience, in the end perhaps a “Great Narrative” that relates to one’s own art production, a kind of “life narrative”, so to speak. And we suspect that this narrative is based on personal skill, grounded on a ‘mental grammar’ of the individual life, the ‘biographical habitus’<sup>16</sup> of its wearer, which co-determines all performative activities, including art production. Seen in this way, the observed process of “becoming an artist” is a surprising biographical project, but – emphatically – no coincidence.

However, neither the artistic mastery nor the form of individual uniqueness has really been adequately described so far. The only theoretical challenge is the unexpected discrepancy between “intuition” and “trust”. Perhaps could help a change from the interpretive reconstruction of an artist’s professional life to a critical consideration of the theoretical ‘model’ that Polanyi introduced into the discussion.

### 3. The Biographical Connotation of ‘Tacit Knowing’

Polanyi is interested in intuition as the basis of competence (cf. also [17], pp. 186ff), or even more fundamentally: as the basis of every perception. He follows the path of

phenomenology and first observes the basic phenomena in the area of the tacit movement of knowledge. The central phenomenon is undoubtedly the way in which we turn to the world, how we perceive it – not only in a psychological but also in a physiological sense: “The structure of perception throws light on the rest.” ([20], p. 29). To a certain extent, perception reveals a structure that is fundamental in all processes of knowledge formation – especially in tacit knowledge: a “from-to-structure”. “We keep expanding our body to the world.” (ibid.). We look, hear, smell, touch and focus on the world.

Eye contact with the world usually seems to be more dominant than any other perceptions. They remain important, but they recede, become, as Polanyi says, ‘particulars’ or ‘subsidiary clues’, supporting details in order to build up implicit, non-consciousness-oriented support structures. But it is precisely in this capacity that they are the prerequisite for the ability to “form intellectually and practically an interpreted universe that is populated by entities” (ibid.). To be more precise, we obviously need a considerable amount of not fully conscious knowledge structures in order to generate explicit, “focused” knowledge about certain “entities” that represent relevant realities in our world.

It seems a bit self-willed, but by no means implausible, that Polanyi distinguishes between two different “states” in the process described: a semi-unconscious, semi-conscious state close to our body sensation (“proximal term”) in which the “particulars” are only perceived as it were: ‘in the shade’; and a focused state (“distal term”) that gives a clear shape and meaning to the “entity” on which attention is directed: “The two terms of tacit knowledge, the proximal, which includes the details, and the distal, which represents its comprehensive meaning, would then be viewed as two levels of reality that are controlled by different principles.” ([20], p. 34).

This observation, whose character differs considerably from psychological theories of perception and which undeniably has an idiosyncratic tinge,<sup>17</sup> can, despite everything, be empirically understood without any problems. For example, when we form words (distal term), we need the support of the muscle movements of our vocal cords (proximal term), which enable us to speak a word but are completely unconscious when we speak. Such words become the proximal term when we form sentences (distal term)

17 In order to supplement the theoretical ‘imaginary world’ chosen by Polanyi with a concept that is perhaps more familiar in its metaphorical choice of words, Habermas’ juxtaposition of a ‘lifeworld’ that “remains behind the participants as an intuitively known, unproblematic and indivisible holistic background” ([13], p. 348; translation by the author) and therefore resembles Polanyi’s “proximal term”, and an “everyday world”, which includes not only the intuitively available background structures that are not accessible to conscious control, “but also the perceived elements of the natural environment, that meets us frontally” ([14], Vol. I, p. 468; translation by the author) and thus comes close to the “focal entity” of the “distal term”. Both, Polanyi and Habermas, are working on a convincing concept for the theoretical description of the transition from preconscious but absolutely indispensable intuitive forms of ‘knowledge’ (“subsidiary” resp. “lifeworldly” confident familiarities) to focused, consciously perceived “entities” in a world as “objectively” available reality (“focal target” resp. things and processes of the “everyday world”).

15 Probably also monetary value.

16 The author has described this phenomenon in many publications with the concept of “biographicity” that he developed in his research group (cf. [1, 3, 4, 5]).

based on grammatical rules, which in turn become subsidies (*proximal term*) when we write a poem or novel (*distal term*) based on aesthetic principles.

The example chosen here shows that tacit knowing is by no means a ‘sister’ of the sub-consciousness or the pre-consciousness, but part of knowledge processes both on the lowest and highest levels of consciousness. Nonaka’s idea that knowledge is a kind of “iceberg” ([19], p. 16), where two thirds remain in the implicit status, is at least misleading. Implicit knowledge is there when we shift from first to second gear while driving, and it is also there when four jazz musicians improvise. Implicit knowledge is needed when we as nurses enter a hospital room and intuitively absorb the atmosphere or when artists assemble scraps of fabric to create a work of art.

Polanyi therefore did not develop any ideas about a hierarchy of levels of consciousness, rather proposed – for pragmatic reasons – an “implicit triad” as an explanatory model to describe the development of the concrete act of knowledge. His triad has three dimensions: (1) the use of the *mind*, (2) the use of *subsidiary clues* and (3) the *implicit integration* of these subsidiary clues into “a focally known whole” [22]. If Polanyi’s assumption is plausible not only our perception functions according to this ‘model’, even creative scientific research or poetry follow this triad. But what does that mean in concrete terms?

When constructing the triad, a distinction must be made between ‘functional’, ‘phenomenal’ and ‘semantic’ aspects. The “mind” uses the subsidies *functionally* to turn a proximal object into something that is suitable distally as a “focal goal”. The functional alignment of the mind that drifts to the distal term transforms the proximal term *phenomenally*. It is seen and experienced differently. The subsidies finally get their signification. The focal goal receives its meaning. In this way the subsidies – viewed *semantically* – form a new whole.<sup>18</sup>

The structure of the triad combines an active, anticipatory moment, which aims at the whole, and a passive, integrative moment, which is related to the inertia of the implicit background knowledge. Every process in which something new arises is a combination of active and passive moments and shows the dynamics of tacit knowing. A triad can be built up suddenly or gradually, but according to Polanyi, *three phases* can be distinguished:

- 1) In the *first phase* we observe an “*anticipating intuition*” (cf. [21]). This refers to promising assumptions, guesses, or vague representations. The ability to do this is based on ‘natural’ sensitivity to hidden patterns [22] and on resources of implicit “prior knowledge”. Intuitions explain why people start a search process even when they still don’t know what they are looking for. They indicate the direction for the subsequent efforts and are, of course, not protected from mistakes.
- 2) In the *second phase*, an imagination takes place that can

be interpreted as “*anticipating the solution*” (cf. [17], p. 211). The mental disposition reorganises the proximal structure by taking into account a higher target quality of the action process. The imagination required for this phase is more concrete than the intuition of the first phase. The associated process of action requires greater effort.

- 3) In the *third phase* – the “*final intuition*” – the distal term is, as it were, ‘unlocked’. The problem is solved. According to Polanyi, however, we can only reach the final intuition indirectly. The search for this “*implicit integration*” is a paradoxical process that accompanies every knowing, every learning and teaching. The paradox dissolves when a kind of “*limbo state*” arises between knowing and not knowing – in a sense, a premonition on a very advanced level, a highly plausible assumption, an intelligent imaginative anticipation, which resembles a “*reflection-in-action*” [24]. This is where the hidden power of tacit knowing becomes apparent.

Polanyi’s differentiated considerations undoubtedly help us to illuminate the ‘gray field’ of tacit knowing and to understand the intelligent, if not speculative ‘model’ of the fluid dialogue between the proximal and distal term. It may even be able to bring to light what has not yet been told about “becoming an artist” in our specific case. A considerable part of the experiences of the interviewed young artist that can be plausibly assigned to the first phase of the “implicit triad”: the touching “*art seeing*” of the little girl with her loving admiration of Paula Becker-Modersohn’s pictures (“*where people were on it, where children were on it*”); the “junk sculpture” of late puberty (“*I don’t really know what that is either. Somehow I felt like I have to do this now.*”); studying design as a “craft” and “introduction” (“*I can rely on myself.*”). All of these are subsidiary clues, which become the proximal term of the later identity as an artist (distal term). Each of these experiences is an “anticipatory intuition”, the resource of implicit “prior knowledge”, the prerequisite of the search for a different, further and deeper professional identity.

The second phase of the triad, which, by the way, is empirically not as convincing as the first and the third one, has left no visible traces in the artist’s biography. It is true that the proximal structure is already reorganised during the design studies. The acquired ‘technical’ skills form a background structure that becomes unconscious, and the self-confidence gained is a prerequisite for the next step. However, there is no evidence that the “intuition” would have become clearer than in the first phase.

Only the third phase – connected with the postnatal high mood (“*then something happened that was interesting*”) – appears clearly recognisable again. Not just the increasing security in the artistic work, but also the absence of any fear of failure and above all the sovereignty in the diploma examination (“*And it was like authentic that it was so easy for me to get my diploma.*”) testify to that “limbo state” that, according to Polanyi, accompanies the “final intuition”.

<sup>18</sup> Polanyi adds the “*ontological aspect*” to the three aspects of tacit knowledge mentioned here, although this is less important for the context discussed here.

The fact that the artist herself prefers the concept of “trust” to “intuition” in this context presumably has to do with the fact that the term “intuition” appears too vague and provisional for the state in which she experiences herself. However, after more intensive reflection, she will understand that this deep trust in herself as a person and in her artistic ability presupposed a learning path in which a set of “anticipatory intuitions” were indispensable – implicit “foreknowledge” of what was to come and, to speak with Polanyi, she will accept it as the “proximal term” of her art. That means she thinks and feels, as it were, ‘from the end’. The reconstruction of her experiences, on the other hand, sees a *process of becoming*, which is full of hunches and intuitions, full of implicit ‘surplus knowledge’.

And yet her ‘history of becoming’ reveals gaps in Polanyi’s theory of knowledge: the concept of “implicit integration” subtly raises a kind of claim to universality that needs to be questioned. On the one hand, the ‘model’ of the “from-to-structure” overlooks “that elements appearing in the subsidiary component that lie in the given external situation” ([17], p. 333; *translation by the author*), that means that the “proximal term” is in a way ‘disturbed’ by its situational context, or at least influenced. That is to say: the ‘from-pole’ depends on a social situation that – in addition to the implicit integration process of the targeted focus – also affects the “distal term”.

What is even more serious seems to be that each ‘from-pole’, for structural reasons, falls back on learning experiences that precede it historically and determine its particular character. Every “implicit integration” has a ‘learning history’. And this learning history is not only determined by the inner form recognised by Polanyi, rather by the “*experiential grammar*” of the perceiving and learning subject, who uses her/his implicit knowledge, her/his “*biographicity*” [4]. Artistry and completely artistic mastery does not only come about through a presupposed mixture of half-conscious and explicit bodies of knowledge. It is based – above all – on a personal history of experience in which that mixture may have an important place, but it is not the only interesting thing (cf. [15]).

One could even reverse the point and see the central importance of implicit knowledge not in the individual acts of knowledge, in which it undoubtedly has the function that Polanyi describes with admirable precision, rather in that incorporated grammar of experience which is the ‘biographical knowledge’ of each and every one shaping our very personal life experience, in other words: the “*biographicity of knowledge*”. “This process is,” as Bettina Dausien, Daniela Rothe and Dorothee Schwendowius summarise convincingly, “in its concrete form individual, but it remains bound to the social context in which it takes place and therefore also has social-structural traits. As Bourdieu described for the class habitus, the attitudes towards experience of the acting individuals also carry within themselves the potential and limits of the social space in which they were formed. Concrete experiences of exclusion, the compulsion of muddling through and succeed,

experiences of recognition and the effectiveness of one’s own actions leave traces and shape the subject’s attitude towards new situations. In principle, they are open to change, but change takes time – a ‘self-logical’ biographical time.” ([12], p. 58; *translation by the author*).

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## Biography

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