I AM WHAT AM I

An essay about ambivalence as a part of the creative process

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Master, Essay
Spring 2013
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore how ambivalence can take the creative process further and how the same state of mind can be used to influence the viewer to redefine and revaluate what they are contemplating in an exhibition space.

In my artistic work I focus on the jewellery more as a tool to explain my concept then on form and functionality. I place my jewellery in situations where it becomes harder to categorise if they are jewellery, installations, sculptures or if they could be interpreted as something else. I am creating situations surrounding my jewellery with the aim to put the viewer in a state where they become ambiguous and are forced to revaluate what they are seeing and experiencing. It can be interpreted as one or several integrated pieces communicating with each other executed in materials that I believe has the qualities that can be connected to ambivalence.

The textual discourse based on ambivalence is seen from different angels and is closely entangled with my own thoughts on the subject and related to my own artistic process and material choice. I further illustrate my considerations by referring to other artists that work with the jewellery in various ways.
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INTRODUCTION

People’s choices, decisions and human behaviour over all has always fascinated me and raised the question why we do what we do. I started to research different mental processes, explained through evolution psychology and behaviour genetics hoping to find some answers that would ease my curiosity. In many ways it did, but it also turned in to something more. The thesis that I in the beginning of my research felt sure where going to be the essence of my paper started to evolve.

I thought that neuroscience and the doctrine about evolution would make me a believer in more deterministic laws. I thought that the theories about the brain and the genetic with all of its many time causal tendencies would make my thoughts on the subject clearer, but it turned out differently. I had a spiritual experience connected to the notion of the many things about the human behaviour that can’t yet be explained and might never be possible to explain. As soon as neuroscience reaches the beyond another beyond appears and I doubt that it will ever stop. This makes me believe in a vital human force, something untouchable and beyond the human perceptions.

The more I read, the less I want to know, but yet I keep reading. Words and sentences that leaves me with a feeling of an awareness that is taking away the secret, the mystical part of being human. I don't want to know that my every step could be the mere outcome of a set of genetic or evolutionary programs that I have very little control over, that all of my emotions and thoughts, the inner essence is possible to be explained in terms of chemical formulas and electric impulses. But at the same time I find it strangely comforting that I might share this mental processes and evolutionary behaviours with so many others and that I’m not alone.

This search for enlightenment has left me stranded with fear, contentment, insecurity, peace, chaos, surprise, dazed, quiescent, melancholy, excitement, ambiguity, insightfulness, sympathy, spiritually.

I have become ambivalent.
INTENTION

Jewellery is meant to be a wearable ornament so what happens when the jewellery is incorporated in a situation where the wearability is questioned? Is the piece still a jewellery or does it have to be classified as something else? As we try to categorise the things we are exposed to, we are confronted with our own ambivalence. When ambivalence take place in our life’s the only way to get out of the conflicting feelings is to make a choice, for better and for worse. Whit ambivalence as a framework I will explore how this state of mind can take the creative process further and how it can be used to influence the viewer to redefine and revaluate what they are contemplating in an exhibition space.

METHOD

In this paper I will look at different theories that analyses and discusses the phenomena of ambivalence and incorporate my own reflections in relation to my practical exertion. An psychological overhaul is followed by a more modernistic way of contemplating ambivalence as an everyday occurrence. A feeling that can occur at any time and any place as a fraction of the daily life, in the same way as joy sadness or any other feeling.

I would through my work an writing like to consolidate that ambivalence is important in our everyday life as a state of reflection, understanding and redefining of the present. Not a struggle between good or bad, but as a tool in the way we define, redefine and observe the things we are surrounded by.

Through explaining my choices of mater in my work I will further show ambivalence as a part of my practical influences and a big part of how the work is presented to and perceived by the viewer.

MATERIAL

I build my exploration on texts regarding psychological research from different angels on ambivalence, comparison with other artists that work with the jewellery in diverse ways and my own artistic process and choice of materials.
Accordingly to a dictionary ambivalence is explained as uncertainty or fluctuation, especially when caused by inability to make a choice or by a simultaneous desire to say or do two opposite or conflicting things. Or in psychological terms the coexistence within an individual of positive and negative feelings toward the same person, object, or action, simultaneously drawing him or her in opposite directions.\(^1\)

When I look at ambivalence through different theories connected to psychology I feel there is something lacking in their statements about ambivalence that leaves me unsatisfied. It seems like the theories is always connected with some severe psychological disorder. For example, one of the most influential psychologists of his time Paul Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939) was the first one to connect ambivalence to a state associated to schizophrenia.\(^2\) We have Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) that saw ambivalence as a conflict between love and hate, strongly connected and expressed through obsessional neuroses and melancholy.\(^3\) Later on Melanie Klein (1882-1960) wrote that ambivalence was a sign of depression and depressive anxiety.\(^4\) Paul-Claude Racamier (1976) said that melancholy is hyper ambivalence and a fear struggle between love and hate.\(^5\) After reading this I asked myself if ambivalence have to be connected only with schizophrenia, obsessional neuroses, depressive anxiety or melancholy? I strongly believe that ambivalence is more multifaceted then what is presented in the previous theories. I’d like to think of ambivalence as a more common state that occurs in people’s everyday life, in different extent. For me ambivalence is a state that makes you reconsider and re-evaluate your present situation, for better and for worse. Ambivalence is a intermediate position that I consider to be of importance for us to move on from one mental phase to another. I see ambivalence almost as a poetic state of mind that can be highly creative and generate a positive feeling and outcome. This poetic feeling is one of my aims in my artistic work.

\(^1\)http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ambivalence
\(^5\)Racamier, Paul-Claude. L'interprétation psychanalytique des schizophrénies. In Encyclopédie médico-chirurgicale. EMC. 1976
MODERNITY AND AMBIVALENCE

Zygmunt Bauman is a professor in sociology and in his book, Modernity And Ambivalence, he provides me with some answers concerning the kind of ambivalence that is more intertwined with our everyday life in our modern time.

In Bauman's book there are many theories about our ambivalence in modern time but I will only reflect around some of the theories that I think is of importance and connected to my artistic investigation. According to Bauman, and to some extent what I agree with, is that we are literally stuck to the presence of ambivalence in our modern times, it's a part of our life's whether we like it or not. If we look at the linguistic practise ambivalence is always present, it's the alter ego of language. We are always trying to name/classify our environment but as soon we encounter something that our linguistic tools can't explain ambivalence will appear. Linguistic is meant to prevent ambivalence but instead of making a world of order it gives birth to more ambivalence as soon there is a constellation that we don't recognise. That is our modern problem solvers dilemma, if one problem is solved another problem is just around the corner. The ambivalence is the waste of our modern times search for order. After every modern progress ambivalence grows in strength and it is unlikely that it will ever disappear or change. Bauman also presents a theory that I connect with my own feeling of ambivalence as a stranger that appears from time to time. In the social construction of friend, enemy and the stranger, it's always the stranger that is the biggest threat. As a friend I know you are on my side, positive and as an enemy you're on the opposite side, negative. But the stranger is a wildcard, there is no way of knowing what the stranger can be or what he is. That's why he awakes more ambivalence then the enemy. For me this theories speaks about that there is no running away from ambivalence and that instead of running away from it we should embrace the stranger, ambivalence. Ambivalence is a part of our life's and we should find out what its purpose and meaning is before seeing it as a problem that has to be solved. I want to redefine ambivalence to a poetic state, a state that is necessary for us.

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JEWELLERY

My background in the craft of jewelry is based on traditional silversmithing and in the beginning of my career I was inspired by silversmiths like Vivianna Torun Bulow-Hube (1927-2004) and Wiwen Nilsson (1897-1974).

This two silversmith’s jewellery is for me the classic model for modernistic silversmithing. Their jewellery is formalistic, wearable and their work is primarily based on precious metals like silver and gold. Bulow-Hube got her inspiration from the ancient cultures idiom: the African, the Oceanic and the Egyptian. But no form is born only to be beautiful every form and function of the jewelry is carefully thought-out. The necessary moments for practical use the lock, the soldered seam, is not hidden but in the contrary emphasized. Behind these choices there are a philosophy about the functional as something beautiful.\(^8\) For me, Bulow-Hubes jewellery is very simple and pure in its forms, often organic and many times with non-precious or semi-precious stones incorporated. She primarily made jewellery that was wearable rings, stiff necklaces with pendants and bracelets. Nilsson is best explained through his artistic statement:” The only artistic effect which I strive to achieve is to make the rhythmic relationships inherent in the proportions come to life.”\(^9\) Famous both for his wearable jewellery and tableware, he worked in the spirit of cubist expressionism with the aim on functional forms. He's pieces consisted most often of gold and silver in pure forms, but in contrast to


Bulow-Hubes, mostly in various geometric forms.

The jewellery I made in the beginning where much like Torun Bulow-Hube and Wiwen Nilsson in expression and its wearability. Now my relationship to jewellery has made a turn, my main focus is not on the aesthetic, the functionality or the technical part. I focus on the concept of jewellery more as an indicator if it’s wearable or not. The necessity for the jewellery to be a bodily adornment has become less important for me and I focus more on the jewellery as a phenomenon, a tool that illuminates the actual concept, in this case my artistic research about ambivalence.

One other thing I found while reading about neuroscience, especially the different theories and phenomena that are connected to art, that there are ways you can visually give the beholder an ambivalent or at least an uncertain truth or feeling on what it is seeing. This is something I been thinking about and wanted to use in my artistic expression in jewellery.
**NEUROSCIENCE AND UNCERTAINTY**

Semir Zeki (1940) explains in his book, *Inner Vision, An exploration of art and the brain* a phenomena that I think is strongly related to my work, the phenomena of situational constancy and implicit constancy. Representational constancy is a given situation that has features that are common to many other situations of the same kind, enabling the brain to categorise it immediately as being all features. Implicit constancy is best exemplified by 'unfinished' works where the brain is allowed free interpreting the ways possible. Jan Vermeer (1632-1675) and his painting, *A Lady with a Gentleman* at the Virginals as an example to phenomena.

The painting derives its grandeur from the way in which its technical

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Virtuosity is used to generate ambiguity. Here the term ambiguity means its ability to represent simultaneously, on the same canvas, not one but several truths, each one of which has equal validity on the others. These several truths revolve around the relationship between the man and the women. There is no denying that there is a relationship between them. But is he her husband, her lover or a friend?

I find myself working with the same phenomena. I place my jewellery in situations where there are several truths, without a simple right or wrong. The work could be a jewellery, an installation or a sculpture. It can be interpreted as one or several integrated parts communicating with each other. The jewellery I make now is not meant/made to be recognised or categorised directly. It has no clear answers in itself and it’s up to the each beholder to reach a conclusion about what are viewed. Its purpose is to make the viewer ambiguous and reevaluate what they are seeing and experiencing.

An example of using this concept is jewellery artist Hilde De Deckers in her work ON THE MOVE. You enter a gallery to see an exhibition but at first glimpse there’s nothing to see. You keep on walking through the room with the feeling that everything is gone and no one is longer there. The gallery sounds hollow, though the rooms are not empty.
Hilde De Decker reduces the material in order for the viewer to visually imagine another material. She uses the void as the visual means to show just what has been omitted. Omission is not the same as reducing the contents, on the contrary, it can show even more and intensify the experience. The exhibition ON THE MOVE is an experience where the viewer can open up their own records of mental images, and rely on what she or he sees. There are objects in the exhibition even if they have taken unexpected forms and gives the concept of material a more subtle reality. This requires more of the visitor but eliminates forced beliefs and preconceptions. Filled with emptiness, this exhibition wavers on the edge of the tangible.

When I went to see this exhibition I left confused. Did i like it or not? Did I really see any jewellery? There where clues and hints of its presence but it was up to the beholder to build an own interpretation of what was there. De Decker disconcerted me with her exhibition and made me question if it´s a necessity that a jewellery has to be physically present as a tactile object. Is it possible to work only with the phenomena of jewellery and still call it jewellery? I left with so many thoughts that I didn't really know what to think or feel. I was in a state that I didn't know if I thought that the exhibition was good or bad, both thrilling and boring, elusive and concrete.
And I like the state that I was thrown in to, for better and for worse. It made an impression, it made me rethink what I've just experienced and it made me see jewellery I had never seen before or even knew existed.

This jewellery art exhibition was truly an eye opener for me. She made me rethink my own expression and concept in the context of jewellery and in this case the phenomena of ambivalence. I wanted to know if could stretch the concept of jewellery so far that it could still be called jewellery but also defined as something else, to have many menings in one piece. The jewellery i

http://www.platina.se/Pressrelease/Hilde_press.html
did before suddenly felt meaningless and pointless with its focus on wearability and esthetic. I wanted my jewellery to be conceptually stronger. I wanted to awake and disturb in the name of jewellery. And why? In this case when i investigate ambivalence i belive that jewellery is a perfect medium to explore the subject. As i think, the jewellery has its strong connection to the body and by taking that away it may awake some ambivalence. As Bauman writes that ambivalence is a part of our modern life and Zeki explains the phenomena of implicit constancy i believe that ambivalence is in our everyday life in so many different forms, socially, psychological and neuroscientifically. I think its important to accentuate that ambivalence is there and its not going away. Then how we handle the fact that its there is another question. Either we just accept its present or we continue to struggle to prevent the occurrence of ambivalence, over and over agin. My personal opinion is that we look at the first suggestion because there is no running away from it and its time that we look at it in a different direction whatever that direction is.

THE BEGINNING

I have started to place my jewellery in constellations that erases the boarder of wearability. The jewellery is placed in a state where it´s harder to categorise what it is and where it belongs and the focus is instead shifted to why it is what it is; a piece of jewellery placed in a pool of black water, where the jewellery's surface is as black as the water, lets the two be visually fused together but physically still separated from each other. A filmed piece of jewellery that consist of a balloon, bouncing
towards a body, created around materials such as helium, air and static electricity removes the physical connection from the viewer both through the choice of materials and the way of rendering the motion. It forces the viewer to make an own interpretation, or none at all, of what motion is caused by what material. A mirror that’s made out of iron, a material that no matter how much you polish it will never show a clear reflection. You can either choose to stop polish it, or continue working with the expectation that its surface can always get to be just somewhat more clear.

**PROCESS**

My creative process originates in my surroundings, transfers through the mind and further by my hands. I don’t sketch in the traditional sense by using pen and paper, instead I build models. By trial and error I find the colours, substances and shapes down to the small nuances that relates to my state of mind. A process that fills me of ambivalence time and time again, lucid or dense, illuminate or darken, to add or subtract. The feeling of ambivalence is not always pleasant feeling but the one that drives me to come to creative decisions.

My aim whit this series of objects is to incorporate different visual effects that makes the beholder uncertain on what´s been viewed. To put the beholder in a situation where objects is caught in between mental states and make the viewer rethink reality while observing the different pieces, installations, sculptures and film.

The aim is to make an exhibition that gives the viewer an over all experience of ambivalence. I want to leave the question up to the beholder about what´s been seen and experienced.

**COLOUR**

Black is the colour that most frequently occurs in my work. For me black includes an excludes. It diminishes readability in the object and works as the primordial void. Even do I strongly believe that colour is mostly a question about acculturation I still think that black has an underlying immanence of uncertainty and ambiguity. The book BLACK, The history of a colour, written by Michel Pastoureau (1947), an historian and a director of studies at the Ecole
Pratique des Hautes Etudes de la Sorbonne in Paris. In the book he explains and investigates the meaning of the colour black in a historical, cultural and linguistic point of view. He confesses that some colours, even do he strongly believe that colours is related to acculturation and that there is no universal symbolic colour system, almost always symbolises the same thing in every society. Fire and blood for red; vegetation for green; light for white; night for black—an ambivalent, even ambiguous night, yes, but always, everywhere, more disturbing then comforting. As Pastoureau states in his book I also think that black is deeply rooted in something ambiguous, even mysterious. Sense my work is about ambivalence I think black it’s a colour that suits my intention in my artistic work to awake that feeling.

**SUBSTANCE**

I’ve been working with water because it intrigues me with its versatile appearance. Water is one of the few substances on earth that occurs synchronously in all three aggregate states, frozen, liquid and gas, and of all the known liquids, water is probably the most studied and the least understood.

The are many artists that has worked with water but I decided to look into Roni Horns work Still Water (The River Thames, For Example). It is a single work composed of fifteen photographic offset lithographs. Each of the fifteen lithographs features a photograph taken by the surface of the River Thames and beholds different perspectives of water as a substance. One of Horns texts connected to the work encapsulates my thoughts about and relationship to water. She describes water with its many different characters and qualities. To mention a few is that you can say water is troubled or calm, disturbed or quiet, hot or cold, chilly or tepid, soft or hard and it can be irritating or lubricating. When I use water in my work I connect it to my artistic research about ambivalence. I believe ambivalence is a state that could be many things in the same time, good or bad, pointless or meaningful, a destroyer or a helper but always more or less present in our life.

**FORMATION**

I use geometric figures in my work, mostly squares and triangles. I feel that

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13 Herwig Oliver, Thallemer Axel. WATE/WASER. Arnoldscbe. 2008
14 Stahel Urs, If on a Winters Night...Roni Horn...Steidl Verlag. 2003
on the contrary to organic forms geometric shapes gives more diversity both in
stability and instability. A triangle placed on its broad side becomes stable,
but by turning it around putting the emphasize on the sharp side it instantly
turns unstable. A triangle states a more direct expression then an organic form
because of its sharp opposite sides. To produce a geometric form on the border
between stabile and unstable, that leans in a line that awakens an awareness of
its unstably, that gives you the sense of the room. I cover the geometric forms
with a thin sheet of silicon to get the effect of a closed form. The geometric
form also fills the function of making the beholder aware of the room and
themselves. By playing with size awareness about the space the viewer are
surrounded by and how that surrounding environment is experienced
is brought to attention. I see ambivalence as a state where you get an
awareness of your body. It’s a state where many different feelings and emotions
are present at the same time and I connect the different geometric forms to
that feeling. Every form has its different constellations and the
interpretation of the meaning is up to the beholder.

Even do the geometric forms I use is mainly of a personal, aesthetic value the
geometric form plays a significant role in my investigation of ambivalence. By
creating a dislocation, however small I’m searching to give the viewer an
ambivalent experience, a feeling that something more is hiding under the
surface.

CONCLUSION

My curiosity on human behaviour led me not only to predicate my work and
writing on ambivalence as a phenomenon and as a part of the creative process,
but also impelled me to address my own ambivalence on the subject.

Ambivalence is not generally considered a desired state of being. Mostly it’s
connected to a state that is dark and confusing, filled with anxiety and
tension. I believe that the very word, ambivalence, raises anxiety in a lot of
people. But isn’t ambivalence just an emotion that is a part of being human? I
would like to emphasise ambivalence as important to us as any emotional state.
Ambivalence works as an intermediate stop that lets us move from one period to
another in our lives. We constantly redefine, edit and discipline ourselves as
a part of belonging to a culture to be a part of the social agenda.

The way we categorise and classify different artistic expressions is dispersed
by artistry that doesn't stay inside the given demarcations. Jewellery has in
the same way as any other handicraft or art form evolved and advanced through
time and has had different meanings but today I believe its mostly seen as a
wearable embellishment. The context that surrounds the jewellery receives an important function as the interpretation of my pieces is made in the in between. The feeling of ambivalence to tempt the viewer to think about what they are experiencing is the thing that makes my pieces come to life.

In my artistic work I would like to express the feeling of ambivalence in a more poetic way. I’m not looking to make the viewer of my work uneasy or uncomfortable, but to think about what they are experiencing and how they are experiencing it to create a space that girdles the pieces and embraces the possibility for the viewer to not only reflect over the pieces themselves but also what they convey on a personal level when the viewer takes the time to really look and look again on the pieces shown.

Reflecting over my own creative process I came to realise that it´s the phases of ambivalence that pushes my work further. The unease of not knowing what to do and the evenly relief when the outcome falls in to place.

**SUMMARY**

I have in this paper explored how ambivalence as a phenomenon can take the creative process further and how the same state of mind can be used to influence the viewer to redefine and revaluate what they are contemplating in an exhibition space.

The paper is initiated by reviewing how ambivalence has been looked at over time and how it’s viewed today as a part of the human process of classifying the things we are surrounded by.

I thereafter direct my attention towards the jewellery through artists that use the jewellery in various ways as an artistic expression, to finally argue around my own creative process related to ambivalence and what I’m hoping to obtain in my final exhibition.

Eventually a conclusion around ambivalence as an everyday occurrence completes my paper.

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