

AestPra – a Meta-methodology for Art and Craft

Positioning of aesthetic practice in academic scientific research

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Abstract

A vast number of research methods have been developed in recent decades to strengthen the creative arts as disciplinary fields. There is an obvious need for specific methods for the creative arts that established academic scientific methods do not cover. Aside from developing and proposing new research methods, there is a need to map and position specific methods for the creative arts in ways that demonstrate how these methods are connected to other established methods within the academic scientific landscape. In this article that is based on my PhD research in ceramic art processes, I introduce AestPra, a meta-methodology used as a tool in aesthetic practice-based research, where knowledge from explorative processes is emphasised. The AestPra methodology includes a network of approaches, various methodologies, methods and strategies. The concept of aesthetic awareness is central and can be defined as an open attitude and sensitivity towards the interaction

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between the form and body through the material. Examples from the thesis 'Grip, to get a grip of form: Concrete and abstract comprehension of form' are used to shed light on the various aspects of the mode involving reflexive, materialised and data-oriented research processes. AestPra supports the combination of various methods that bring aesthetic, and embodied knowledge into play and that generate links between concrete experiences and theories.

Keywords: aesthetic practice, meta-methodology, ceramic media, embodied knowledge, abstraction, visual articulation

Introduction

The academic scientific landscape is complex. To be *part* of this landscape means first and foremost contributing to new knowledge. The various disciplines have specific methodological approaches to research, as well as methods and strategies appropriate to their field. Within the creative arts, a vast number of research methods have been developed in recent decades to strengthen the disciplinary field (Almevik, 2017; Biggs & Karlsson, 2011; Grimsgaard, 2018; Leavy, 2017). The concept of *research within the creative arts* involves various disciplinary fields, e.g. artistic research, and aesthetic practice-based research. The different terms are used in an overlapping fashion and should be understood from their context. Even though the creative arts have developed strongly as research disciplines, art practitioners still face challenges when conducting academic scientific research on their own academic terms. One reason is that the relationship between practice and theory is still hierarchical – where theory traditionally takes precedence over practice (Medbo, 2016; Wilson, 2018). Research is dynamic, and methodological approaches and specific methods will change as a result of different paradigms, and sometimes be transformed through use by other disciplinary fields. New interesting areas for research are developing. However, there is a need to revitalise and develop existing methods within the field that encourage explorative approaches and the use of aesthetic tools for analyses and communication, e.g. the use of abstractions as articulations of form and activities, and as expressions of relations and interaction (Akner-Koler, 2007; Hannah, 2002; Özkar, 2017). The sketch 'Concrete – Abstract' (Figure 1) is used as a visual statement, which represents the connection between concrete experience and abstraction in the context of comprehension of form.

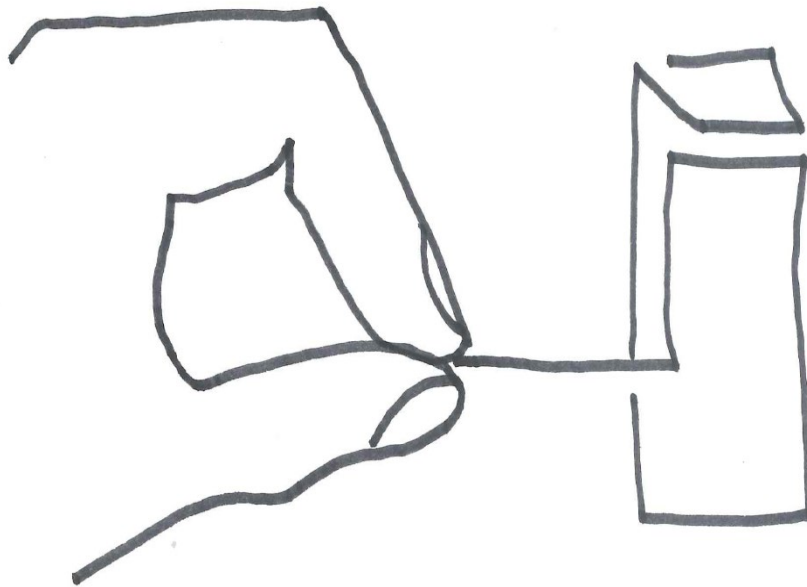


Figure 1. 'Concrete – Abstract', a visual statement of the connection between concrete experience and abstraction. The sketch is from the doctoral thesis, 'Å gripe form for å begripe form. Konkret og abstract formforståelse'[Grip, to get a grip of form. Concrete and abstract comprehension of form] (Heimer, 2020, p.1).

Instead of producing and proposing new methods, the AestPra model is introduced, a meta-methodology that represents a *position* for aesthetic practice-based research within the academic scientific landscape (Figure 2). The expression AestPra is an abbreviation of aesthetic practice. The term *aesthetic practice-based research* is used rather than artistic research in order to emphasise knowledge derived from aesthetic experiences, and hands-on processes with forms and materials. Aesthetic practice-based research is defined as a combination of artistic research (Leavy, 2019; Arlander, 2014; Biggs & Karlsson, 2011; Hannula et.al., 2013), craft science and practice-based research (Almevik, 2017; Gustavsson, 2000; Molander, 2017). In aesthetic practice based research, one has a dual role as practitioner and researcher. To enable the researcher to study and describe experiences and results of the research processes from an inside perspective, the auto-ethnographic method is crucial (Ellis et.al, 2011). However, the model for AestPra demonstrates how methodological approaches from the arts are combined with other disciplinary fields in the humanities, social sciences and science.

AestPra has been developed based on experiences from my own research in the doctoral thesis, 'Å gripe form for å begripe form. Konkret og abstract formforståelse' [Grip, to get a grip of form. Concrete and abstract comprehension of form] (Heimer, 2020). The embodied knowledge achieved through the explorative form processes in clay is in the thesis articulated and analyzed, which gives a supplement to the abstract form theory based on geometry. In the following section, 'Background to the development of AestPra', I present my personal motivations and challenges relating to being a part of the academic scientific landscape. The structure and the various levels in the model are described in the section 'AestPra – meta-methodology for aesthetic practice-based research'. In the last section, 'Exploration - a methodological approach to research', I use examples from my thesis to shed light on the various aspects of the model.

Background and research goals

The research field for my thesis soon became quite complex as a result of the many layers of work, the use of methods from my own professional field, and influences from other disciplines. It was hard to keep track of the *core* of the project, due to many possible methodological entries and findings. From my experiences with my doctoral thesis, the motivation to highlight the aesthetic methods and strategies became an issue, as did assigning practice-based research a clearer position within the academic scientific landscape. I can identify with the ceramic artist and researcher Anne Solberg's expression 'the battle of the gray zone' from the first years of working on the thesis. According to Solberg 'the battle of the gray zone' represents artistic research that demonstrates the risk of accepting and leaning too much on other disciplinary research frameworks (2017, pp. 222-232).

The main topic of the thesis was comprehension of form, and I took for granted that I could use theories and methods from the creative arts as my main sources. However, I met a resistance from researchers, who requested *the real* theories and methods and asked for sources from more *established* disciplines. During this process, I lost track of the core of the project. Despite a large part of the research consisting of my own experiences and results from my aesthetic practice, there was a lack of disciplinary confidence. Together with the theories about abstract form, my own created data, including reflexive and analytical processes, became more like background information, and were not sufficiently *activated* in the research. My contribution was reduced to illustrations of research by others, including practice-based and practice-led research within the creative arts. As Solberg has expressed it,

the original research approach became ‘an extra component, not included’ in the sense of academic scientific research (Solberg, 2017).

A methodological turning point in my research process was a model for case study, designed as a meta methodology, launched by Rolf Johansson (2007). Johansson describes case-study methodology as *relationships* between different methodological levels in research. The model was developed based on his experiences of handling multiple methodological approaches, methods and strategies, working in the field of architecture and urban planning. The model shows how different methodologies from both qualitative and quantitative research can be combined with associated specific methods for data collection, and works as triangulation to generate different perspectives on the material created in the exploration. The model inspired me to assign *aesthetic practice* to the position of a meta-methodology. The *idea* of AestPra helped me during the last phase of my thesis. Nevertheless, my thesis was about comprehension of form, and the methodological discussions AestPra represented were not included in the thesis.

AestPra – A meta-methodology for aesthetic practice-based research

The AestPra model (Figure 2) represents a methodological position for aesthetic practice-based research within the academic scientific landscape. The structure communicates the many layers of research and how different methodological approaches, methods and strategies are combined and intertwined. The model demonstrates how exploration functions as an overarching methodological approach to artistic research, combining methods from art and craft with other humanistic fields, e.g. hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnography and grounded theory (originally used as a quantitative, data-oriented method).

The aim of combining various explorative methodologies is to stimulate interaction between intuitive and systematic processes, practical and theoretical points of entry. The model also communicates the importance of aesthetic awareness as a strategic approach to utilising embodied knowledge and the role of visual and materialised processes. The insights from aesthetic practice should be connected to relevant theories and other sources throughout the research.

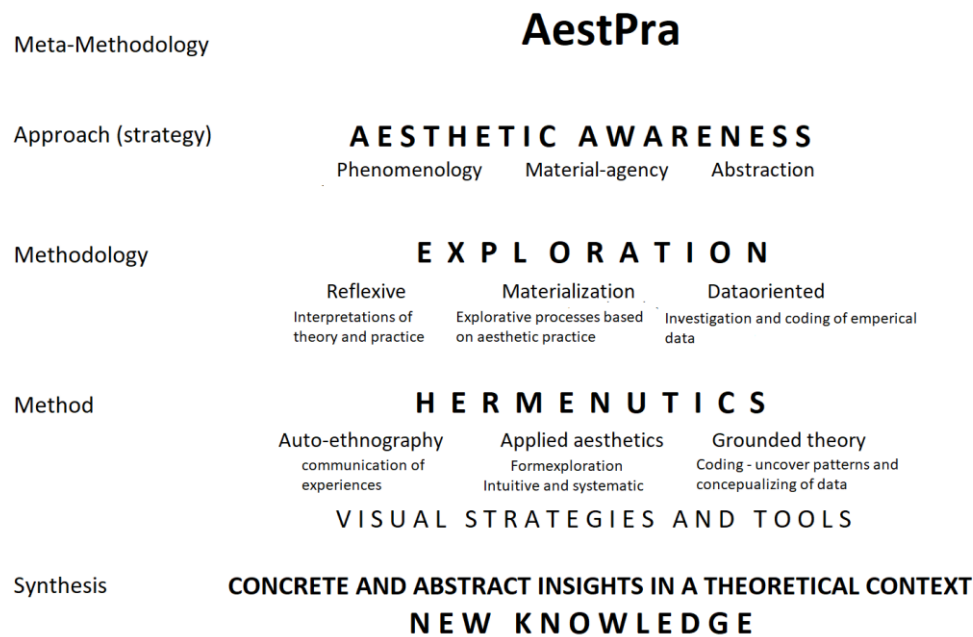


Figure 2. AestPra, a meta-methodology for aesthetic practice-based research. Explorative methodologies are overarching in relation to the different methods and strategies from aesthetic practice and other academic scientific research (Heimer, 2022).

AestPra – Meta-methodology (Level 1): A meta-methodology for aesthetic practice-based research.

Aesthetic awareness – Approach (Level 2): A central aspect of the explorative process is the concept of aesthetic awareness, defined as an open attitude and sensitivity to interaction between the form and body *through* the material. In this context, aesthetic awareness is exemplified as: (i) Material-agency, (ii) The body’s perception (phenomenological approach), and (iii) Abstraction – used as interpretations of forces and movement. The role of these strategies is to strengthen the experiences in the different phases of the research and to enhance interaction and the communication of complex, non-verbal materials.

Exploration - Methodology (level 3): At an overall level, aesthetic practice-based research can be seen as a combination of explorative methodologies: (i) Methodology for the materialisation of explorative processes, to create data; (ii) reflexive methodology for describing and interpreting collected and created data (from theories and practice); (iii) data-oriented methodologies for investigating and coding empirical materials. The purpose of combining the three methodologies is that

the pertaining methods generate various forms of data and knowledge. Together, they will contribute to extracting different forms of *articulation* – verbal, visual, material.

Hermeneutics - Methods (level 4): A vast number of methods can represent the three methodologies. In this model, hermeneutics has been chosen as an overarching approach to exploring experiences and materialised processes and the results of them. In addition, the various methods will contribute to interpretations of the total material, viewed iteratively from different perspectives. The method chosen: (i) Applied aesthetics - methods for exploration, is about creating data through hands-on materialised processes and visual exploration, including the use of abstraction. It applies to both intuitive and systematic methods. In this model, applied aesthetics involves craft methods; (ii) Auto-ethnographic method – self-reflection, based on the inside perspective; (iii) Grounded theory – investigation and coding of empirical material. The coding process takes place in two steps, partly as a conceptualisation of non-verbal data (substantive coding) and further contextualising of the concepts in a theoretical context.

Synthesis (Level 4): A level where concrete and abstract insights, interpretations and coded data are contextualised as new theory. The results primarily consist of new knowledge – expressed through various forms of articulation: materialised, visual and text. That means that forms from the materialized processes are part of the total result.

Linking different methodologies and specific methods and strategies in AestPra functions as *triangulation*, which is recommended as validation in research projects. Triangulation is a strategy, particularly in qualitative research, for providing different perspectives on the same data. It is used to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 5; Groat & Wong 2013).

AestPra – in use

Examples from my thesis demonstrate key points in AestPra e.g., that *aesthetic awareness* is part of the research competence for art and design, and how the various explorative and analytical approaches can be *articulated* both through text and visual representations. The model in Figure 3 shows the academic framework for my thesis, with *comprehension of form* as the main topic. The three areas for the research were form theory, perception, and aesthetics. In addition, the terms

concrete and abstract were used to emphasise various forms of knowledge used to enhance the connections between practice and theory. The theoretical framework includes sources from other research within the creative arts, distributed on a timeline of hundred years. In addition to new concepts of comprehension of form, they involve concepts from the modern era. Seven series of modelled clay forms and the experiences from them constitute the main empirical material in the thesis. The two problem areas for my thesis are: Experiential knowledge –in relation to– Form theories, and Synaesthetic perception – in relation to– Visual perception. The problem formulation is: How can synaesthetic comprehension of form based on experiences of form exploration in clay be articulated, so that it complements and develops theories of form based on geometry and geo-organic vision?

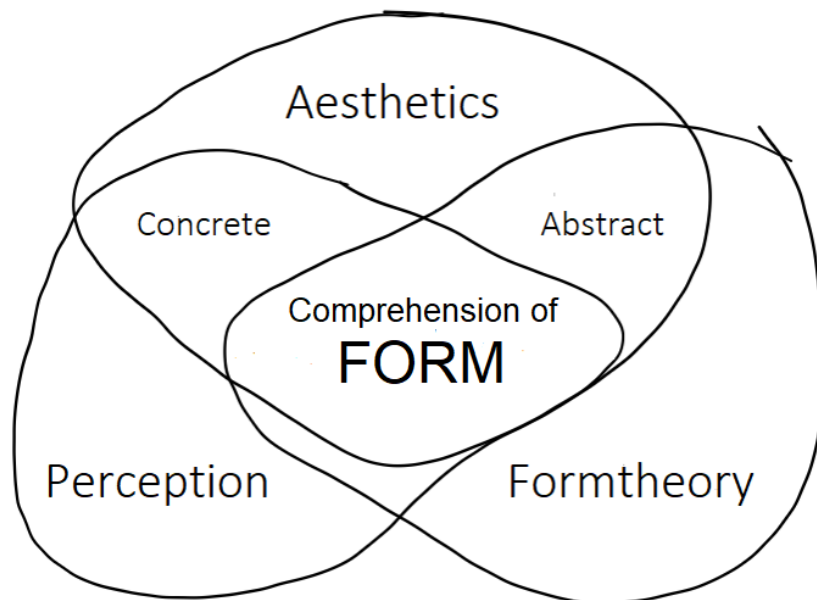


Figure 3. 'Comprehension of Form'. A model for the main theoretical framework, chosen for the doctoral thesis (Heimer, 2020, p. 11).

The examples in the next sections are structures based on the levels of AestPra: Aesthetic awareness, Exploration, Hermeneutics and Synthesis.

Aesthetic awareness

Aesthetic awareness is central to my work, exemplified as: (i) Material-agency, (ii) The body's perception, and (iii) Abstraction. The material's role in comprehension of form is described as a special form of attention, and to artists it is common to

perceive the form process as a dialogue rather than purely as control over the material (Berensohn, 1987; Nimkulrat 2009). The photo in Figure 4 shows material-agency. The photograph shows the clay being pressed and how the mass, as new form, develops through the gaps between the fingers.



Figure 4. 'Interaction between positive and negative forms (material-agency)'. The photograph showing the clay being pressed and how new forms appear through the gaps between the fingers (Photo: Eva Brænd, 2020). (Heimer, 2020, p.79).

According to Lambrous Malafouris

'Agency is a property or possession neither of humans nor of non-humans. Agency is the relational and emergent product of material-engagement. It is not something given but something to become realized' (2013, p. 148).

The body's perceptions are a field for exploration and engagement. In the philosopher Ulla Thøgersen's interpretation of Merleau Ponty's phenomenological perspective on embodied knowledge, reduction is described as a strategy to change fixed attitudes, such as habits, thoughts and actions. The purpose of the reduction is to 'free ourselves from the bonds of the familiar world, to rediscover the world, and to

let ourselves be amazed and thereby make the world appear again' (Thøgersen, 2004, p. 94). For researchers within aesthetic practice, this means to open up, and *participate* in our perceptions. To draw is of great value in that sense. Being able to capture selected features of form and lines describes an aesthetic awareness. Juhanni Pallasmaa describes drawing as a fusion of external and internal reality and as 'spatial and haptic exercises that fuse the external reality of space and matter, and the internal reality of perception through the mental imagery into singular and dialectic entities' (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 89).

The sketch 'Synaesthetic' (Figure 5) is made as a representation of the interplay between visual and haptic perception. It reflects the multisensory aspect – what we perceive with one of our senses is stimulated by experiences using other senses (Pallasmaa, 2009, 2012). Modelling organic, hollow forms is an example on that. Through my work as a ceramist, I experience how the clay is pushed outwards and inwards at the same spot. That make me *perceive* the convex and concave form simultaneously, while the visual perception only gives one perspective at the time.



Figure 5. 'Synesthetic', a sketch as an expression of the interaction between visual and haptic perception (A. Heimer, 2020, p. 3).

Exploration

In AestPra, three methodological approaches are characterised as explorative: Materialisation, Reflexive and Data-oriented. In this context, they represent open-ended processes, where the problem to be explored is not necessarily clearly defined. The research is dynamic, and the different processes often overlap. Intuition and exploration are key terms in aesthetic practice-based research. Intuition can be

hard to define and activate. Boris Müller points to misconceptions of intuition, conceived as something irrational, ‘associated with impulsive decisions and aesthetic extravaganza’ (2017, p. 1). However, Müller defines intuition as a skill, and describes it as a creative strategy in research, pointing to the dynamics of interaction between conscious and unconscious actions. ‘Generally speaking, intuition is the ability to reach conclusions and make decisions without conscious reasoning’ (2017, p. 2). Müller emphasises that decisions and results based on intuition are also possible to examine, test and evaluate. Intuition can be learned, and in this connection, it is important to develop a linguistics that makes it possible to discuss intuitive actions and results (2017, pp. 3–5). Clear criteria function as intentions and frame explorative processes. In my thesis, the grip is the starting point for the materialised exploration of form. The grip and the modelling hands were defined as form, structure and movements. The photo ‘Modelling Hands’ (Figure 6) is an example of how definition of the hand functions as a criterion for exploration, which contributes to framing the creative space for the actual explorations of materialised form.



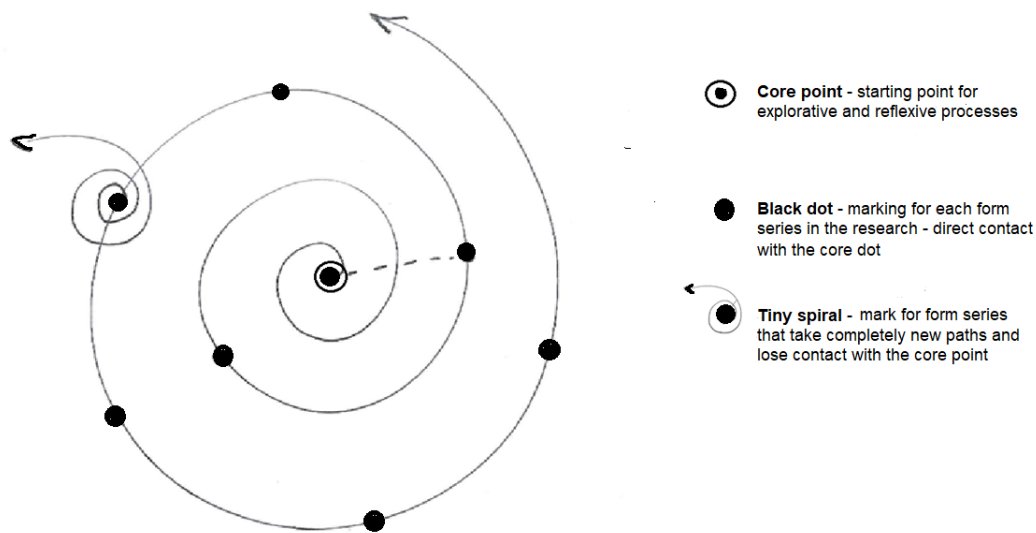
Figure 6. ‘Modelling hands’. From a series of photographs showing characteristic positions and movements when I explore forms of the grip (Photo: Geir Foshaug, 2014) (Heimer, 2020, p.66).

Reflexive methodology is an approach to collecting and uncovering data for *interpretations*, and data-oriented methodology is an approach to *investigations* of data. In AestPra, the reflexive approach mostly relates to here-and-now experiences to demonstrate the inside perspective, while data-oriented methodology here

functions as an approach to investigating the material on a more general basis. Reflexive methodology enables researchers to communicate the research field, and present interpretations in perspective (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). There is no method that leads to the truth, but using a hermeneutic approach to the research contributes to an interplay between what one already knows, imagination and interpretations of the data for the study (Berg & Walstad, 2011; Krogh, 2009).

Hermeneutics

In my research, new forms and knowledge develop through an 'Artistic hermeneutic spiral' (Figure 7), where reflections of the materialised processes, various forms of interpretation and contextualising occur as an iterative process. Self-reflection and various strategies for interpretation are run as an ongoing hermeneutic process during the making, analyses of the form processes and the finished forms.



Artistic hermeneutic spiral
Structural Model for form exploration and reflexive processes

Figure 7. 'Artistic hermeneutic spiral'. Structural Model for form exploration and reflexive processes. (A. Heimer, 2020, p. 46).

The model illustrates the dynamic process in the research. The spiral starts with a *core point* for the explorative and reflexive processes. In my case, the 'Hand Sketches' (Figure 8), constitute the core point in the research. Each black dot on the spiral represents the different form series with a given framework and criteria. The frame and criteria for each of the new form series develop from experiences, and

reflections on, one or several of the previous form series. The hermeneutical processes take place back and forth between the starting point and the new perspectives. This gives the grip as a core concept a richer content.

Applied aesthetics as a method for exploration is about creating data through hands-on materialised processes. The 'Hand sketches', the first of seven form series in the research, are made intuitively, as a dialogue and process through which I perceive and re-act on the actual form through the process. A spherical clay form serves as a constant, and a starting point for the form process. The variables constitute various ways of using the hands and the fingers when modelling the forms. The many variables indicate a creative space for form exploration rather than a systematic investigation of a specific phenomenon.



Figure 8 'Hand sketches'. The photograph shows the variation of form expression in the form series Hand sketches (porcelain) (Photo: Pedersen 2012). (Heimer, 2020, p.80).

The auto-ethnographic method is about reaching, and drawing attention to, the many layers of meaning that are inherent in human actions (see Gertz in Alvesson & Skjöldberg, 2009, p. 183–186). In my dissertation, the function of the auto-ethnographic method is to enable me to study and describe forms and experiences from form processes from an inside perspective. In artistic research, personal interpretations are not only valuable – they are the key to expanding creative

processes (Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, 2018; Arlander, 2014). In the auto-ethnographic method, you are required to yourself go deep enough into the field and the phenomena to be described. For aesthetic practice-based research, the goal is to arouse embodied awareness of how to approach and understand forms on a deeper level. One important criterion for the Hand-sketches was to explore forms as interaction between positive and negative form, through the work on the plastic clay.

When I press the clay by tightening the grip, the clay form develops through the gaps between the fingers. This action represents material agency – an intuitive way of creating forms in clay, based on the form, structure, force and movements of the hand. I perceive the explorative process as a multi-directed movement between the clay and myself (Heimer, 2020, p. 79).

All aesthetic practice-based research is multi-sited, and multi-dimensional, which means that a phenomenon, or a situation, is not static. What matters is what we perceive, concretely through our senses, in a particular place, from a particular perspective (Gubrium, 1997). All the organic forms from my form exploration were analysed and coded through various visual strategies. One of them was the *small multiples* strategy, a strategy for communicating complex material (Tufte, 2013, p. 69). Figure 9 demonstrates how small multiples are used to describe multiple perspectives in a Hand-sketch. The composition shows nine photographs, taken from nine different angles. The photographs are set up systematically with a clear visual variance between each angle. The nine photographs emphasise that there are large variations in expressions of the form, seen from the different perspectives. The image sequence demonstrates a need for multiple perspectives on an organic form, to enable a holistic experience of form. However, selecting only three positions and three angles, the changes in form do not appear gradually, and the different expressions of the form appear instead as contrasts. That means that the visual strategy, the small multiples, functions as a structure for how a form, articulated as a *visual grip*, unfolds both multidimensionally and through contrast.

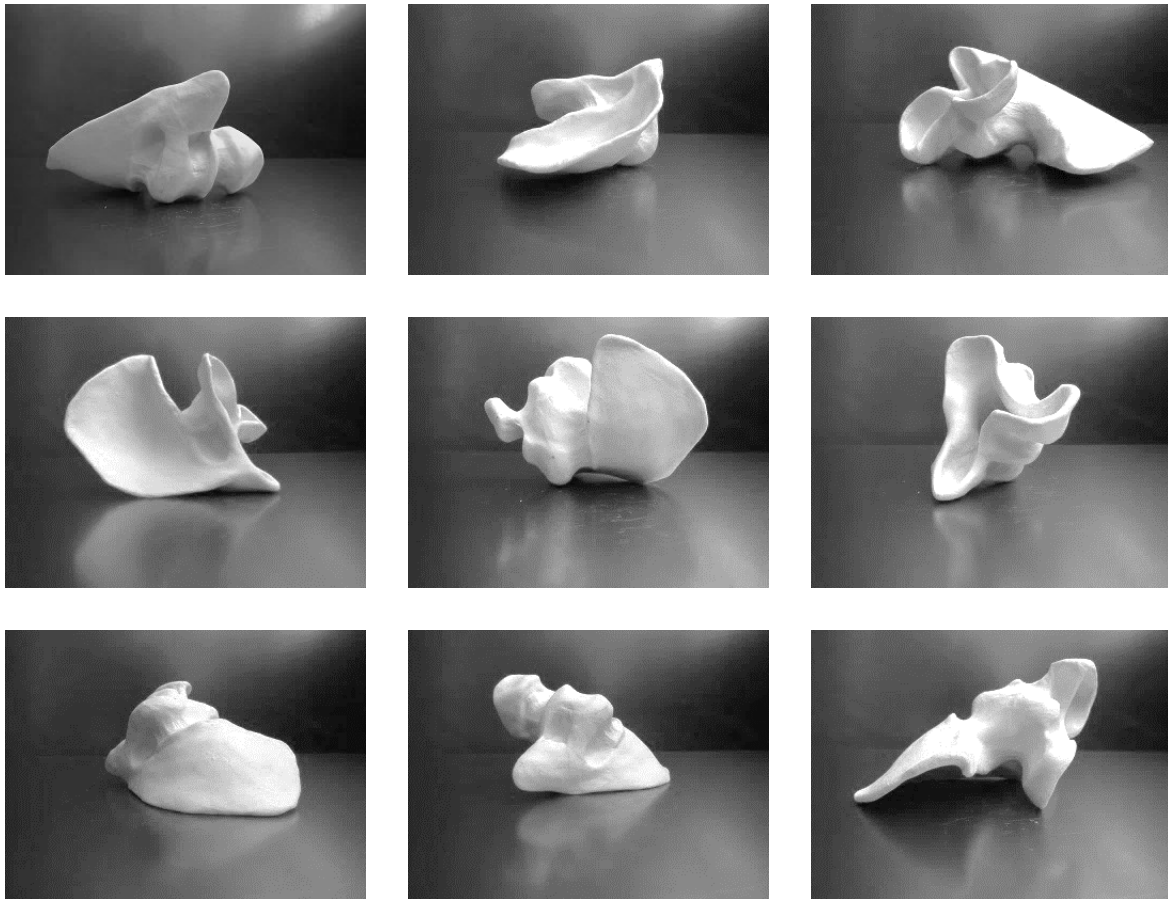


Figure 9. 'Hand sketch-multi-perspective'. Hand sketch, photographed from nine different perspectives. Small multiples are used as a visual strategy to systematically refer to the diverse expression of the organic form (Heimer, 2020, p. 87).

From my experiences with the Hand sketches, I became aware of how the *positions* of my hands strengthen my perception in ways that gave a different and a richer experience to the forms. Therefore, two positions of the grip (upside, downside) became variables for the next form series, 'Hollow hand forms', I also choose to use two variables for the modelling hand (thumb and three fingers) (Figure 10).

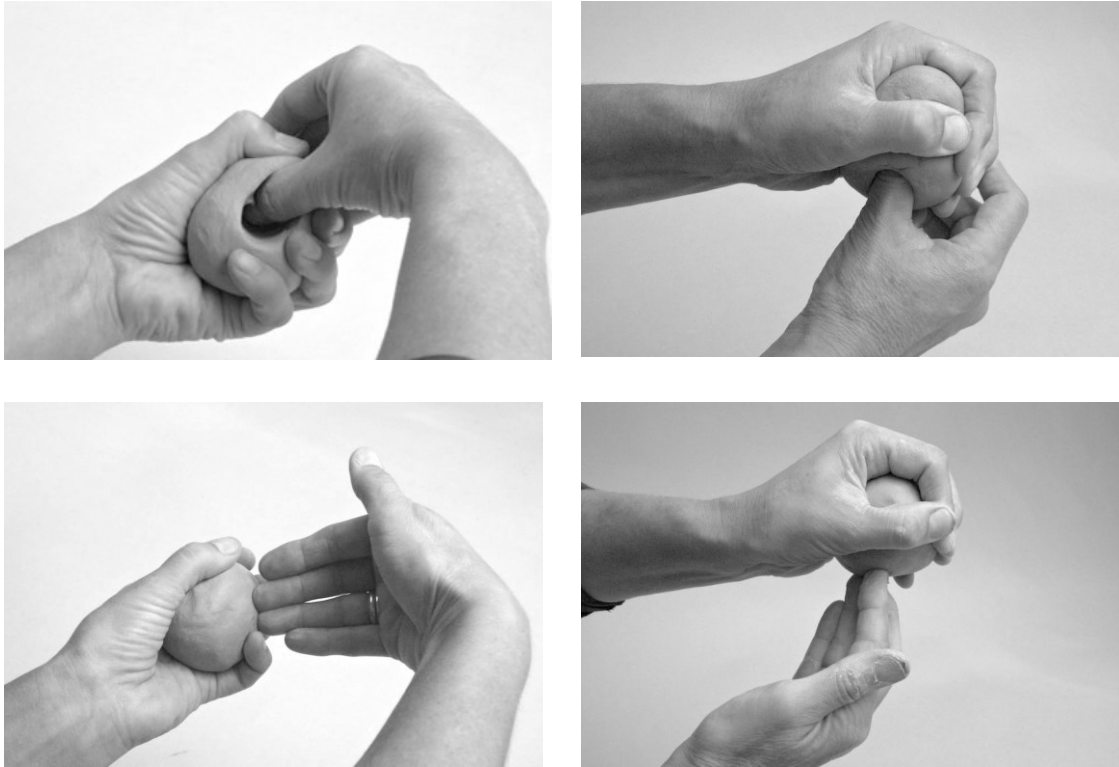


Figure 10. 'Hollow hand-form' process images. The images show the grip of my left hand in two different positions when I model using my thumb. OT (left), NT (right). The pictures show the grip of the left hand in two different positions when I model using three fingers. O3 (left) N3 (right) (Photo: Richard Burkett, 2012). (Heimer, 2020, p. 98).

Through this form series, I continued to explore the interaction between positive and negative forms, but this time a negative space was investigated as hollow hand forms. The interaction between external and internal form also became an interesting part of the exploration of this next series.

Investigating the empirical material, based on the concept of coding in grounded theory, proved to be helpful in the analyses of the empirical material. The method functioned together with the auto-ethnographic method as a distilling process, with the intention of accessing the core of the knowledge that lies behind what first appears. In the examples, there are no clear differences between the use of these two methods. However, the auto-ethnographic method has stimulated me to open up and tell *the story* of my form-experiences (see the quote below), while the coding is mainly related to *systematic investigations*, e.g. descriptions and analyses of grip positions and the modelling fingers.

«A negative form of the grip becomes an imprint into the clay, as a trace of the body's form and movement. The form in process, has not yet been devised, but follows the structure of the grip that has been pushed into the clay (Notes from my diary, February 2013)

Modelling upside down and using three fingers were new ways of working for me, and I experienced more tension and that my hands were less coordinated during these form processes. (Heimer, 2020, p. 109). Nevertheless, the photo to the left in Figure 11 shows that the forms I modelled using three fingers appear to be more dynamic than I would expect based on my experiences. Descriptions of the making and the finished forms demonstrate how this exploration expanded my experiences of modelling and led to – for me – surprising results, which is a goal of explorative processes.

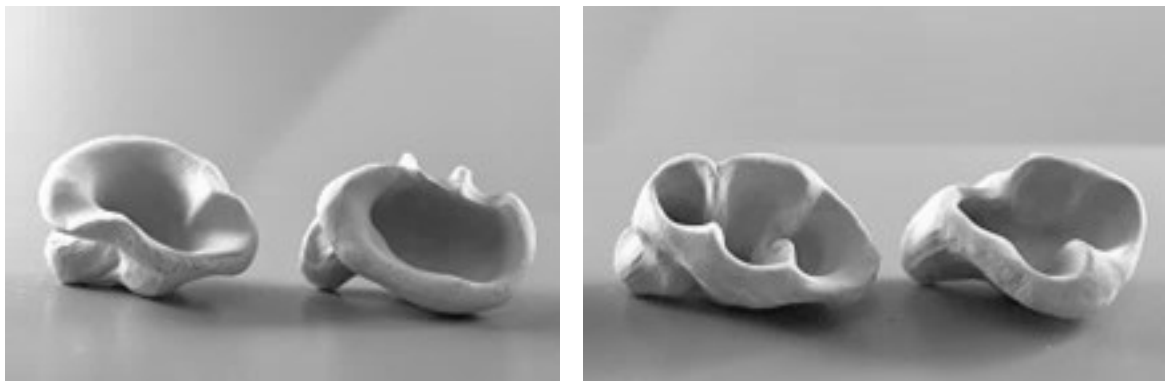


Figure 11. 'Four characteristic shapes from the series Hollow hand forms' (from the left - up / thumb; down / thumb; up / three fingers; down / three fingers (Heimer, 2020, pp. 108).

In the creative arts, *the line* is used in exploratory and analytical processes (Amacker, 2017; Kandinsky, 1979; Klee, 1961). The sketches in Figure 12 and 13 are analyses of a Hollow hand form. The forms are organic and complex, and the examples illustrate how lines are used to articulate my comprehension of the forms in various ways. The criterion for the sketch on the left is to articulate the form based on what I see. The sketch therefore mainly represents the external form, characterised by the grip of the hand pressed into the plastic clay. The *visual form* is perceived soft and organic, from the interplay between the convex and concave forms and the contrasts of proportions. The criterion for the sketch on the right is to articulate my impression of the inherent structure of the form. It gives an abstract dimension to the same form and shows how I perceive the organic form more geometric as straight, active lines.

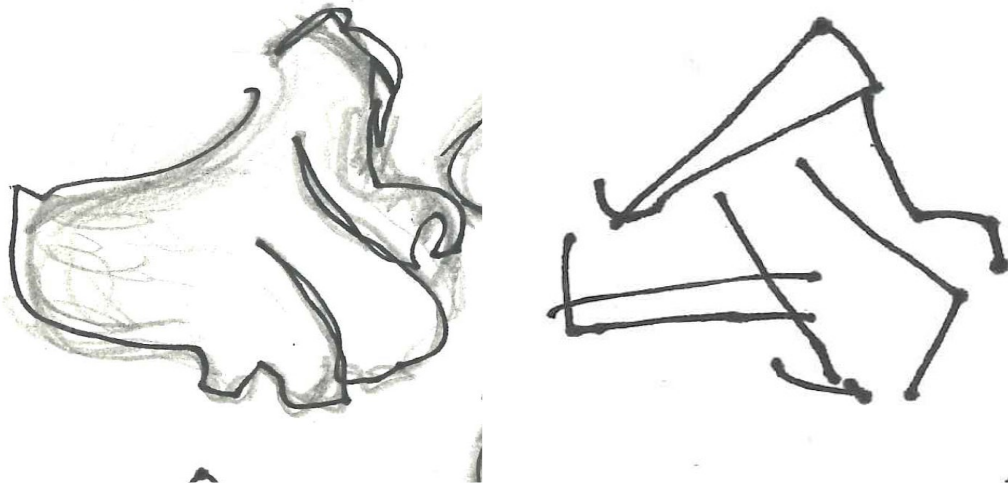


Figure 12. 'Sketches of Hollow hand shapes'. Two sketches with different analytical functions. Expression of how I perceive the form from what I see (pencil and felt-tip pen) (left); expression of how I perceive the form abstract, as inherent structure and directions (marker) (right). (Heimer, 2020, p. 105).



Figure 13. 'Sketch of Hollow hand shapes'. Sketch as an analysis of how I haptically perceive a Hollow hand form. A continuous line is used as a visual strategy, to communicate the dynamic expression, and the interaction between external and internal form (pencil and felt-tip pen). (A. Heimer, 2020, p. 105).

The sketch in Figure 13 shows a third version of the Hollow hand form. The criterion for this analysis is based on the principle of *continuous line*, described by Alexander Calder (Marter, 1997). Through this sketch, I endeavour to capture how I perceive the

form with my *active* hands. It shows my perception of the form and the form making, demonstrated as dynamic movements and of interaction between the external and the internal form. Before drawing the sketch, I have explored the form with my hands, blindfolded, to free myself from the visual information. I experienced that closed eyes made a remarkable difference, and the form and my experience of the inherent movement in the form appeared much clearer to me.

The three sketches represent versions of a Hollow-hand form, based on three different criteria for the line. Together, they act as coding of a non-verbal material. None of the three sketches represents the truth of the form. They give three different values and meanings to the form.

To be able to grasp the phenomenon and conceptualise in ways that generally apply to the phenomenon, the researcher must work through several coding processes, to clarify the phenomenon based on its flexibility. That does not mean that an organic form as a phenomenon becomes less flexible, but as knowledge of a form, it must be described precisely and richly, to communicate its complexity. Coding based on principles from grounded theory encourages the researcher to, 'show and talk about reality' (Gubrium, 1997, p. 5).

Synthesis

Through the synthesis, the concrete explorations and investigations are anchored in a broader theoretical context, where the connections between a concrete and abstract understanding of form are strengthened. The organic forms, characteristic concepts and other forms of articulations and analyses that are developed in the project, form new perspectives for a synaesthetic multidimensional comprehension of form. Three examples of synthesis are demonstrated by (i) photos of characteristic clay forms, (ii) 'The dual perspective of the grip', a sketch, functions as a concept for multi-perception, and (iii) a concept-map for The Grip as a core point for embodied comprehension of form. The photographs in Figure 14 show characteristic forms from each of the seven, form series in the research. The sculptural forms express a great variation of forms – all forms are based on the Grip. The concepts for the various form-series have been developed through the process initiated by the artistic hermeneutic spiral. All form series contribute in various ways to the development of *the Grip* as a concept for form and perceptions.



Figure 14. 'Hand sketch, Hollow hand form', 'Hand shell' (upper row), 'Grip extension' , 'Twisted form', 'Modelled choreography' (bottom row). Six photos of characteristic forms from each of the form series in the thesis, 'Grip, to get a grip of form. Concrete and abstract comprehension of form'. Photos: Astrid Heimer (1,2,3,4,5), Ryan Gray (3), Richard Burkett (7). (Heimer, 2020)

The sketch 'The dual perspective of the grip' (Figure 15) represents a visual grip, a caricatured line that captures something essential about the hands' perceptions and the experience of modelling clay forms. The sketch 'The dual perspective of the grip' (Figure 15) represents a visual grip, a caricatured line that captures something essential about the hands' perceptions and the experience of modelling clay forms. The example demonstrates a concept for haptic and kinaesthetic perceptions, as the dual perspective on direction and movements that are experienced through the interaction of the force and movement of the grip and the plastic clay. At the beginning of my research, sketches like 'The dual Grip' were left out of my log book for the research, and it took time to give the sketches space, and to use them properly as part of the total articulation.

The concept of *the Grip* is defined as the core point of embodied comprehension of form, it is a starting point and orientation for form exploration. Through the research, several aspects have been added to the concept of the Grip. The concept map in Figure 16 contains five aspects, which serve as a summary of the Grip: (i) Starting point and orientation for forming processes, (ii) The core point and structure of organic forms (asymmetric form and structure); (iii) Terms – resting, enveloping, force, (iv) Origin of positive and negative forms (forms and counter forms), and (v) The dual perspectives of the grip *through* the plastic clay.



Figure 15. «The dual perspective of the grip». The sketch represents an experience of haptic perception of grip in interaction with the clay. The grip is simultaneously perceived as resting, enveloping and as forces (A. Heimer, 2020, p. 144).

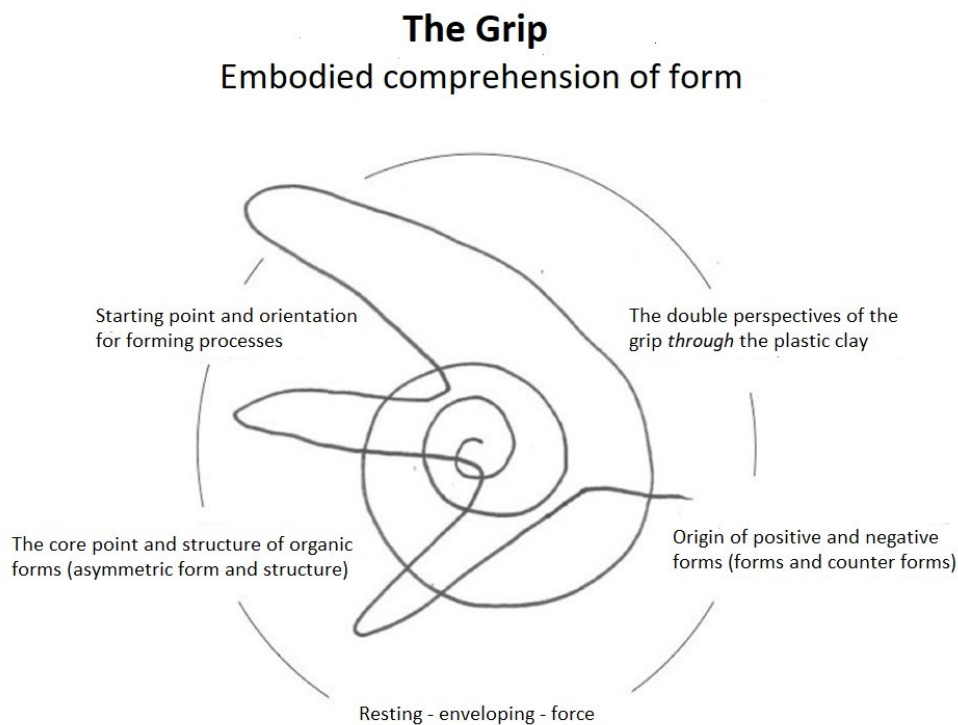


Figure 16. 'The Grip', concept map for the grip as a core point for embodied knowledge (Heimer, 2020, p. 180).

Concluding remarks

The aim of this article has been to give aesthetic practice based research a clearer position *within* the academic scientific research. The research based on practice, as perceptual ceramic investigations are *articulated* through text, visual expressions through sketches and photos to demonstrate communicative tools for aesthetic practice based knowledge. AestPra represents a triangulation of methods and, by combining the different methodological and pertaining methods and strategies, the model endeavours to communicate the importance of applying several perspectives to the same data material. Emphasising exploration as an overarching methodological approach in research will encourage open-ended processes, which is essential. Using AestPra, I endeavour to demonstrate the potential of combining various methods that bring aesthetics and embodied knowledge into play, and that generate links between concrete experiences and abstract expressions of forms and materials. Interaction between reflexive processes through materialised explorative work and the writing processes is essential. The text and the visual articulations must open for the *reading* of the concrete – experiences with forms and materials – in the

research. It is important to promote a space for the interpretation of associations as a form of creative understanding. The AestPra model and the examples in this article demonstrate how the application of aesthetic practice-based research in art and craft can contribute to making sense beyond the own disciplinary fields, as part of the academic scientific landscape. Versions of the model will be adjusted to the fields of research, and as models for other interdisciplinary areas of research, e.g., ArtSoMa for art & socio-materiality, where a relational approach and concepts for agency might be an overarching topic for the model.

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