

**TEENAGERS' SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCES IN AESTHETIC AREAS:  
SOME EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS REGARDING  
THE ROLE OF DRAMATIC ART**

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# **TEENAGERS' SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCES IN AESTHETIC AREAS: SOME EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE ROLE OF DRAMATIC ART**

## **Abstract**

Fifteen-sixteen year old Fenno-Swedish compulsory school pupils' descriptions and evaluations of significant, i.e. more or less "strong", experiences relating to dramatic art (film, theatre) were analysed and compared with reported experiences in other aesthetic areas (music, nature etc.). The drama area was represented in many experiences, but could not, however, compete with the music area regarding the number of reported experiences and the rated strength of these. As to different ways of confronting drama, experiences involving own acting or ordinary (i.e. not school-arranged) theatre attending were strikingly few, and those related to TV- or video watching were not especially numerous despite pupils' frequent leisure time watching of films via these media. Effects of gender and place of residence were noted in many respects, e.g. regarding experiences connected with TV/video watching vs. cinema attending (cinema more frequent among the girls and in the capital), and regarding the type of film experienced (girls reporting more experiences of drama films). Higher average strength ratings for the reported experiences were noted in the capital (vs. towns and countryside), for experiences involving drama films (vs. horror, action etc.) and films watched at cinema (vs. on TV/video), among the girls, and for the very few experiences involving own acting. A comparison with significant experiences in the music area showed that these more often involved own overt performing and (partly as a consequence of this) more social and creative activities than did the drama experiences. In discussing educational and research implications, the necessity of theatre and audience development projects initiated by schools or community agencies was especially stressed.

## **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE**

In the last decades there seems to have been a growing interest to explore aesthetic experiences in naturally occurring situations, and especially such experiences which have made some exceptionally profound impression. Two somewhat different examples are Sloboda's (1990) study on musical childhood memories, and Gabrielsson's large project on "strong experiences related to music" (Gabrielsson 1989; Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik 2003), where subjects were asked freely to describe the most intense music experiences they ever had. Such studies are of value for basic research and theory, and may naturally also provide useful knowledge regarding practical ways of enhancing aesthetic experiences. Research of this kind has so far focused on music experiences, although Panzarella compared "peak experiences" of both music and visual art (cf. Panzarella 1977, a pioneering study besides that of Pennington 1973 on musical peak experiences). Methodologically, these studies typically require the participants to remember and retrospectively describe earlier experiences.

The current research project could shortly be characterized by the following distinctive features:

1) Also this study concerned naturally occurring experiences which had been more or less strongly felt, since such experiences evidently are especially important. The focus here, however, was not exclusively nor even primarily on experiences being uniquely intense. Rather, the capacity of aesthetic stimuli to cause feeling reactions in current everyday life was considered central. When the

young participants in this study were instructed to write down descriptions of "strong" experiences and the social-situational context of these, they were therefore encouraged to think, in the first place, of experiences within the last few months. Here, these experiences will be called *significant experiences*.

2) Earlier research on strong experiences has mainly considered adults. In this study the participants were young people still in their middle teens and attending compulsory school, thus constituting a socially and academically unselected group, of interest not least from an educational point of view.

3) Due to the lack of studies which simultaneously involve experiences in different aesthetic fields, the original plan to explore music experiences was completed with the idea of including experiences also in other areas of art, such as visual art, film and theatre, literature and dance. Finally, also the "non-art" area of nature was included, since nature is also considered an important source of aesthetic experiences. All these areas are here denoted by the term "areas of aesthetic experience" (or shortly "experience areas"), and occasionally the first-mentioned ones are referred to as "art areas".

### **Purpose of the article**

The project had its starting points in music psychology and education, and since music also turned out to be the "art area" most frequently represented in the participating pupils' described experiences, the first published reports of this research have treated the music experiences (Ray 2004, esp. ch. 5; Finnäs 2006).

Another area frequently generating significant experiences was that of dramatic art, here mostly called the "drama area", comprising film and theatre. This first report about these experiences mainly focuses on quantitative data regarding characteristics of and relations between variables concerning the frequencies and "strength" of the experiences, subjects' background characteristics (gender, residence area), characteristics of the films and plays in question (comedy, action, drama etc.) and different ways of confronting them (by TV, cinema, theatre, own acting), and contextual factors.

Closer analyses on qualitative aspects of the participants' reactions (affective, evaluative, intellectual, analytical etc.) must be postponed to a later contribution, which is also intended to present such comparisons of qualitative responses between different experience areas, which this project makes possible (here, purpose no. 5 below represents a step in this direction. Regarding the importance of comparisons between different arts, cf. Carroll 2000, 52).

Thus, the main purposes of this article will be the following :

1) to present some data giving a rough quantitative estimate of the relative importance of the drama area for these teenagers, based on the number of the pupils' reported experiences and on their ratings of the "strength" of these. Both here and regarding purposes 2) - 4) pupils' gender and place of residence, two potentially important background variables, are also explicitly taken into consideration.

2) to compare the frequencies and strength ratings for experiences deriving from different modes of confronting dramatic art, i.e. viewing films at cinema or via TV, or encountering live drama as a spectator or an actor.

3) to explore the extent to which the pupils' drama experiences involved different types of films and plays, and to compare the strength ratings for these.

4) to examine the participants' free comments about various social and physical aspects of the experience context, such as, e.g., type of company, locality etc.

The results earlier noted for the music area also made possible some elementary comparisons between music and drama experiences, which, in turn, drew attention also to some qualitative

differences of experiences in the two areas. Thus, a fifth purpose is:

5) to compare experiences in the drama and music areas regarding frequencies of different modes of confrontation, and to note some qualitative aspects, which this comparison brings into focus.

### **Some preliminary considerations**

The study was regarded as mainly exploratory and no advance hypotheses were thus specified, but some brief preliminary reflexions could be made, based on theoretical thinking and earlier research. Regarding frequencies and strength of experiences from different areas or types of situations, it could be hypothesized that two factors would generally be particularly important, i.e. the accessibility of the stimuli or situations in question (cf. the comments on "availability" in Panzarella 1977, 248-249), and the extent to which these really make an impression on the persons confronting them. It seems that the areas of music and dramatic art should be especially favoured regarding accessibility, because music, films and plays can be enjoyed in a rather undemanding way by mere listening and watching, and because modern ways of producing and reproducing sounds and images provide a great supply especially of recorded music and film, which, moreover, may be conveniently received even in one's own domestic environment by easily manageable technical equipment (radio, tapes, discs, TV etc.).

The second aspect, considering the impression made by phenomena characteristic of different areas, is far too complicated to be discussed here. Regarding dramatic art it could at least be maintained that films and plays have an extremely effective narrative potential, as they guide the spectator both visually and aurally through stories and episodes which may easily evoke profoundly experienced moods and affects.

Besides the factors mentioned, there are no doubt many other relevant elements at work. Some individuals perhaps prefer to accompany a narrative with their own personal associations and images, thus getting more satisfaction from reading a book than from following a film (somewhat like people accusing the visual stimuli in music videos of interfering with their own inner images, cf. Springsklee 1987). Other factors are more general. While, for example, reading a book may take days and viewing a film may take hours, the temporal "unit of confrontation" with music mostly is only a few minutes long. This, along with the intensely marketed supply of "youth music", makes it possible for a teenager to get acquainted in a very short time with an immense number of different music pieces, something which of course favours occurrences of significant experiences in the music area.

Many empirical results can be found regarding young people's interests and preferred leisure activities, but it is often doubtful to what extent these are relevant for the significant experiences in the areas here studied. In Alsaker & Flammer's (1999) large European-American investigation on adolescents, for example, categories like "Playing music" (i.e. an instrument), "Watching television" or "Leisure reading" are clearly too narrow or too wide to represent the current experience areas. A typical finding in several studies seems to be that young people take a great interest in music and film, in that order, and somewhat less in literature. Visual art is generally only a minor interest, as are acting or attending theatre, but the two latter ones, besides the film viewing, give some additional importance to the dramatic area (Bjurström 1997, esp. the data regarding Swedish high school pupils' "cultural activities", pp. 349, 352; Nilsson 1998, who asked 16 year old Swedish teenagers separately for their leisure activities and their *most important* interests, cf. esp. 76-79; cf. also the American study cited by Bachen 2007, 241-242, regarding young people's use of media at home). Every specific pattern of results may be somewhat modified by subgroup differences, the most consistent of which is a tendency among girls to be more interested in literature, compared to boys (cf. all above-cited studies in this paragraph, and e.g. Drotner 2003, 23-24; Mustonen et al. 1992, 237).

Concerning the importance of various ways of confronting dramatic art (cf. purpose 2), there is an

extremely great accessibility of dramatic art via the TV-set, which can serve as a medium both for a multitude of TV-channels and for watching films on cassettes and DVD discs. A somewhat similar way of film watching is made possible through the computer, but a recent Swedish study by Antoni indicated that even among young persons used to loading down films on their computers, the TV was still their most usual medium for viewing films (cf. Antoni 2007, 30, fig. 29). On the contrary, the availability of possibilities for viewing films at cinema has been greatly reduced in the last decades especially in less urbanized regions, and the possibilities to watch live drama are also restricted by the lack of theatres in many places and the fact that theatres only stage a limited number of plays each season. Confronting live drama as an amateur actor mostly presupposes some special and often only temporary projects in school or society.

As to the impact of different confrontation modes and situational aspects, Monaco (1981, 9, 33-37) maintains that film has a greater narrative potential than theatre, due to its greater capability of presenting details and real or realistic locations, of accentuating actors' gestural and facial expressions by large images and close-ups etc. He admits, however, that the live character of theatre is a great advantage. Likewise, Metz (2000, 409-410), although stressing the "perceptual", qualities of film, recognizes the additional values of a situation where "real persons in real time and space" act directly in front of an audience. This could be expected to make for a kind of "social contract-situation", where the actors engage to communicate a story to people who have decided to give them close attention. This attention and other reactions may be intensified by simultaneous attention and reactions in the collective of persons being present. Moreover, a visit to the theatre is a special occasion, often also a social event, and the very preparing of this visit implies a certain commitment to take one's role as a spectator seriously. Even more discussed has been the effects of film watching at cinema compared to TV. Also typical cinema visits may be regarded as special and social events requiring audience commitment, and also here experiences may be enhanced by the collective situation. The large screen in a darkened hall may attract viewers' attention and interest in a most compelling way. TV-watching, on the contrary, typically implies watching much smaller images in an everyday situation, where one's attention is easily disturbed or interrupted by occasional boring passages, commercials, or influences from outside (Costanzo 1984, 222; Fiske 1992, 57, 74; Hietala 1994, 179; O'Sullivan et al. 1998, 149-150; Stam in Stam & Miller 2000, 34). The cinema has thus mostly been regarded as the ideal place for film viewing, despite certain warnings against overemphasizing the differences of TV vs. cinema. TV watching does of course not exclude attentiveness, there may be disturbing effects also in a cinema audience, the equipment and atmosphere in many of our circumplex cinemas are not always the same as in the traditional halls and palaces etc. (Herkman 2002, 138-139; Fründt 1988, 169).

As was already suggested, empirical results confirm that theatre is a minor interest among young people (e.g. Willis 1990 cited by Trondman 2000, 168; Bjurström 1997, 348-352; Nilsson 1998, 76-82). Regarding the cinema-TV difference and considering the problem issues of the current study, it is interesting to find in Antoni's (2007) above-mentioned study a strikingly high preference for cinema especially as a forum for experiences. Cinema-going was regarded as rather inconvenient and expensive, but nevertheless at least about 80% in every age category under 50 (youngest one: 15-19) considered cinema the principal medium for getting "the best film experience"; the highest percentage for any other medium (including TV-channels, Internet) was about 10% for DVD. Also among the young (15-29) "downloaders", a majority chose the most positive "very true"-alternative to the statements "film is best at cinema", and " I prefer to view the really good films at cinema". The statement "Cinema-going is a way of socializing" generally met with agreement, and most so in the youngest group (Antoni 2007, esp. 16 fig. 13, 30 fig. 29, 35 fig. 35, app. tables 22a-b, 31, 43).

Regarding background variables, the access to various experience areas should be much the same for both genders, and differences in boys' and girls' relations to these areas should thus reflect

genetically or socially conditioned diversities. Clear gender differences implying greater female participation or interest in theatre seems to be the rule (Lahtinen 1998, and regarding young people Jönsson et al. 1993, 64-65; Bjurström 1997, 348-349, 352; Nilsson 1998, 82, 86). Another recurrent finding, relevant also for purpose 3 above, is that females more often prefer films and plays with romantic or dramatic-emotional content and stories about human relations, rather than e.g. action films (Lahtinen 1998, 252; O'Sullivan et al. 1998, 8, 140-149; Antoni 2007, 22; Jönsson et al. 1993, 63, 65; Bjurström 1997, 583; the last two references especially concern young people).

The degree of urbanization might have decisive consequences for the access to cinemas and theatres. Some data by Antoni (2007, table 20) suggest that film viewers in the countryside and smaller towns compensate for the paucity of cinemas by looking more at film channels on TV, but the total amount of watching films "often" nevertheless increased with urbanization, primarily due to a greater occurrence of cinema visits in more densely populated areas, especially in the capital. Nilsson (1998, 88-89) found clearly more theatre visits among young people in the Swedish capital than in less urbanized places. Such results certainly also reflect the greater proportion of families with higher socio-economic status in more urbanized areas: positive correlations between theatre interest and father's occupational status were found both by Bjurström (1997, esp. p. 348-352) and Nilsson (1998, 87; Nilsson also notes the similarity of this result to earlier ones).

As to the "comparative" purpose 5, some above-mentioned results as well as some research on strong experiences of music (Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik 2003) suggest that experiences of live performances is more usual in the area of music (generally in the form of concerts) than in the area of dramatic art (generally: theatre). The quite common mastering of instrumental skills among young people (e.g. Alsaker & Flammer 1999, 42-43) also makes it probable that experiences related to one's own performance are more frequent in music area.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of pupils in the ninth (i.e. last) grade of the Finnish compulsory school. Data were collected in the end of the spring or (for only 3 classes) of the preceding autumn term, when practically all subjects had reached the age of 15 or (somewhat fewer) 16. In 1993-1999 data collection sessions were administrated by the author or his assistants in 50 classes in 13 schools, selected to represent various types of residential areas in the Swedish-speaking and bilingual regions in Western and Southern Finland. Three schools were located in the countryside, seven in small or medium-sized towns (8.000-55.000 inhabitants) and three in the capital Helsinki (600.000). 832 subjects were present at the sessions, i.e. 411 boys, 406 girls and 15 with unknown gender.

### **Procedure**

An attempt was made to secure a sufficient amount of relevant experiences partly by including a considerable number of subjects, but also by trying to make clear to these what kind of experiences they were expected and not expected to report. Firstly, the pupils were made to focus on relevant experience areas by a questionnaire distributed before the instructions proper, with items exemplifying 1) "receptive" activities in aesthetic areas: reading fiction and poetry, watching films and plays, listening to music, watching music videos, attending concerts, being interested in visual art and visiting art exhibitions, and staying outdoors to enjoy nature (always with 3-4 response alternatives indicating how often the pupils engaged in such activities: every day - several times a

week . . . etc.), and 2) corresponding "productive" activities: writing prose or poetry, making music by playing or singing, acting in amateur theatricals, drawing or painting, and dancing classical or modern dance (alternatives: yes-no). Secondly, in the oral instructions many different examples were then presented of how similar activities often may be accompanied by more or less "strong" experiences (eg., finding some visual object particularly beautiful, being captivated or moved by the story in a book or a movie). Thirdly, when finally asked to write down such strong experiences, the subjects were explicitly instructed to think of experiences such as those just mentioned, and to avoid reporting other ones, especially three other types of experiences that, according to a pilot study, were very frequently reported as generally "strong" ones: those connected with love or friendship, with one's own or others' accidents and with one's own or others' successes and failures in various activities; reporting such experiences were not "allowed" if they did not happen to contain elements clearly related to some aesthetic area.

The pupils' task was then to write a short essay about at least one experience of the kind suggested. They were instructed to consider mainly experiences during the last two or three months, but to feel free to describe experiences in a more distant past if no recent ones seemed "strong" enough. They were asked to describe in detail each experience and its social-situational context, and also to rate its strength on a scale ranging from 4 to 10, with 4 indicating an only barely strong and 10 an overwhelmingly strong experience. All information was given anonymously.

### **Categorization of experiences**

The categorization of experiences into different areas (listed in table 1) was made by the author and was mostly quite straightforward. Experiences related to live scenic art or films were generally referred to the main area called Drama, but it was considered desirable to establish a separate category of "Drama+music" for the cases where drama was combined with music as an important element, as is the case e.g. with musicals and music films.

Some cases of recurring or continuing involvement in a certain phenomenon or activity were considered experiences in the same way as those reported to have occurred on a single occasion. Representative formulations regarding Drama were of the type: "I like acting. When I am on the stage, I . . .", or "Especially when I have seen historical films . . .".

The classification of drama experiences according to different modes of confronting the object or activity in question was quite uncomplicated, because even relatively meager descriptions generally made it clear whether the pupil had been an actor or a spectator and, in the latter case, mostly also whether the experience resulted from watching a live performance or confronting the drama by audiovisual means (cinema or TV/video). Regarding the live performances it should be mentioned that the data collection sessions in some town schools coincided with a period of visits to theatres or visits to the schools of theatrical groups. This certainly increased the probability of reports about such very recent visits, with a consequent overrepresentation of the number of live drama experiences in these schools, and a more moderate, but still notable, overrepresentation of drama experiences generally.

The classification of certain experiences, mainly related to music or nature, was sometimes complicated by the presence of various different elements in the experience situation. Here, reports of situations containing different elements but ordinarily conceived of as mainly "musical" ones (concerts, music videos) were considered to represent the music area, if they did not qualify for the Drama+music category. Some more specific experiences of situations comprising "mixed" components were classified according to the most salient elements described. For instance, a report containing both music listening and painting was counted as an experience of visual art if the music was described only as a background factor, but was referred to the music area if the music was

described more closely and as providing a crucial incentive for the painting.<sup>1</sup> Eight experiences where the lyrics of a song evidently had been especially important were still classified as musical rather than literary ones, since the lyrics were always described as something heard along with the music, and not only read as separate poems.

The category of Nature comprised outdoor experiences accompanied by reactions (of enjoyment, humility etc.) in front of natural sceneries or phenomena. Since the data collection mainly took place in May, this readily invited reactions to the arriving or newly arrived Nordic spring, which for these pupils also signalled the end of the compulsory school. The number of nature experiences thus probably were inflated in a misleading way, although far from all "spring experiences" were referred to the area of nature (e.g., experiences without clear references to natural phenomena or sceneries, or expressing no more than happy feelings of the "spring is here-summer is coming-school is ending-variety", were referred to the non-aesthetic category).

Regarding other areas, it may be mentioned that Literature included reactions and activities related to fiction or poetry, but not to factual information in books and newspapers.

### **Quantitative analyses**

In the quantitative analyses of the results simple statistics have been preferred, which do not demand much of the data regarding their distribution or measurement level. Arithmetic means are presented to make group differences more clear on the "strength of experience"- variable, but in testing significances of such differences, nonparametric methods based on medians and chi-square tests are used (cf. the "median test" described by McNemar 1969).

### **A comment on the nature of the significant experiences and the strength ratings**

As has been made clear, the written reports were expected to describe more or less recent experiences, regarded by the participants as sufficiently important or memorable to be worth reporting when they had been instructed to describe "strong" experiences in aesthetic areas, according to the explanations and exemplifications given in the instructions. Instead of speaking about "strong" experiences, however, the term *significant experiences* has here been preferred, to avoid unnecessary confusion with the strong experiences studied by the type of research first cited above, i.e. experiences pretending to be of an exceptional "peak"- or "strongest ever had"-variety. Actually, the pupils' reports covered the whole range from deeply felt reactions to those apparently considered barely worth mentioning (occasionally indicated by formulations such as "I don't know if this was any really strong experience, but . . .").

The described experiences generally expressed positive reactions, at least in the form of making appreciative comments and of personal involvement (in some music, the story in a book, the plot of a film etc.). In the aesthetic areas unequivocally negative reactions were rare, and in the drama area primarily considered a few pupils' complaint over the quality of some of the above-mentioned plays arranged by the school shortly before the data collection. This might illustrate a tendency to report such very recent special events less for their impact and more as a convenient solution to the problem of "finding something suitable to write about".

The pupils' numerical ratings of the strength of the experiences could not be tested in any simple

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<sup>1</sup> In the Finnäs 2006 report, the "salient elements-principle" was applied somewhat more widely. E.g., a few concert experience descriptions relating feeling atmosphere and audience behaviour without mentioning anything of the music were referred to the non-aesthetic category, and some descriptions noting only theatrical aspects of a musical were classed in the drama category; no "drama+music" category was used. This (and the correction of a few coding errors) explains the moderate differences between data in Table 1 below and the corresponding data in the earlier report.



way for validity or reliability. Generally, they seemed to relate rather closely to the degree of liking or involvement, with higher ratings accompanying descriptions containing more expressions of interest, identification with the actors, excitement, emotion etc. On the other hand, occasional low ratings given for experiences verbally described as quite intense, and vice versa, indicated that the reliability of the ratings was far from perfect (regarding similar inconsequencies also among adult subjects regarding music experiences, cf. Pennington 1973, 6-7).

## RESULTS

### Frequencies and strength of experiences in different experience areas

The reports obtained from 776 of the pupils varied considerably from short notes to descriptions covering 3-4 sheets of paper. As only 21 subjects described more than one experience, the frequencies and percent values in table 1 are based on subjects rather than experiences as the basic units, according to a "one experience per subject"-principle. For the pupils reporting two or more experiences, the one with the highest "strength rating" was chosen. The category named "Other aesthetic" refers to 10 descriptions of mixed or vaguely defined experiences.

Table 1. Frequencies, percentages and strength ratings of experiences for different areas.

Area	Countryside		Towns		Capital		All regions		Strength rating mean	
	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %		
Music	8 <b>10</b>	15 <b>17</b>	46 <b>24</b>	47 <b>23</b>	28 <b>31</b>	23 <b>21</b>	82 <b>23</b>	85 <b>21</b>	8.1	
Drama+music	1 <b>1</b>	- -	3 <b>2</b>	3 <b>1</b>	6 <b>7</b>	4 <b>4</b>	10 <b>3</b>	7 <b>2</b>	8.3	
Drama	10 <b>12</b>	14 <b>16</b>	26 <b>14</b>	22 <b>11</b>	11 <b>12</b>	17 <b>15</b>	47 <b>13</b>	53 <b>13</b>	7.5	
Literature	4 <b>5</b>	15 <b>17</b>	12 <b>6</b>	20 <b>10</b>	2 <b>2</b>	13 <b>12</b>	18 <b>5</b>	48 <b>12</b>	7.4	
Visual art	- -	- -	7 <b>4</b>	8 <b>4</b>	8 <b>9</b>	3 <b>3</b>	15 <b>4</b>	11 <b>3</b>	7.1	
Dance	- -	1 <b>1</b>	- -	6 <b>3</b>	- -	- -	- -	7 <b>2</b>	8.5	
Nature	13 <b>16</b>	24 <b>28</b>	27 <b>14</b>	53 <b>26</b>	9 <b>10</b>	19 <b>17</b>	49 <b>13</b>	96 <b>24</b>	7.8	
Other aesth.	1 <b>1</b>	2 <b>2</b>	1 <b>1</b>	2 <b>1</b>	1 <b>1</b>	3 <b>3</b>	3 <b>1</b>	7 <b>2</b>	7.6	
Not aesth.	45 <b>55</b>	16 <b>18</b>	70 <b>36</b>	41 <b>20</b>	24 <b>27</b>	28 <b>25</b>	139 <b>38</b>	85 <b>21</b>	7.6	
TOTAL	82	87	192	202	89	110	363	399		
General strength rating means according to gender and area of residence :					Boys	Girls	Countryside	Towns	Capital	
					7.42	8.02	7.55	7.64	8.08	

The percent values for drama vary between 11 and 16 for different subgroups and indicate that this experience area is a relatively important one. The values for music vary considerably (10-31%) and are clearly higher than the corresponding ones for drama in the urbanized regions, where also the girls' values for Literature (town: 10%, capital 12%) approach those for Drama (11%, 15%; the upward bias of the values in towns should be remembered). In the countryside the values for music and drama are largely at the same level for both boys (music 10%, drama 12%) and girls (17, 16) and, since the female subjects consistently show higher values for literature, this area also shows a value (17) comparable to those for music and drama among the country girls.

The Drama+music category contains only 17 pupils' reports, most of which described the same rather special event, i.e. attending a performance of the musical *Cats* at *The New London Theatre* on a recently made class voyage.

For the "non-art" area of nature, the percentages are mostly rather high (10-28) and tend to increase with decreasing urbanization especially for girls. It thus occupies the top position of all experience areas in the countryside (boys 16%, girls 28%) and also for the girls in towns (26%; music

23%). In the three other subgroups its values roughly equal those of drama. Here, however, the probable overrepresentation of nature experiences in all subgroups, due to the earlier-mentioned "spring-period effect", should be remembered.

In the category "Not aesthetic" one finds a wide variety of experiences, often considering interpersonal relations, reactions (of interest, indignation etc.) on information presented in non-fiction literature, newspapers or documentary television programs and, especially among the boys, success experiences (in hunting, sports etc.). Most of these reports reflected no explicit consciousness of the fact that the described experience was not of the kind requested in this study. The majority of the countryside boys' (55 %) and more than a third of the town boys' experiences (37%) are of this kind. These two subgroups also contained the only notable numbers of pupils not reporting any experience at all, i.e. 15 boys in the countryside and 27 in towns; all other subgroups contained only 1-5 such subjects.

According to the results in the total group regarding all aesthetic areas represented by more than 20 cases, the mean ratings of the strength of the experiences in different areas seem rather closely to parallel the corresponding numbers of experiences. Thus, music with 167 experiences (82+85) and more than 20 percent of the experiences in both gender (total) groups, is also noted for the highest mean of 8.1, while the mean is one scale step lower for visual art, with its only 26 experiences and percent values of 3-4.

The mean rating of 7.5 for drama experiences could possibly be somewhat underestimated due to the possibility that several town pupils, in the way suggested above, could have chosen to describe recent theatre performances more for convenience than for experiencing them especially strongly. This was quite evident for 3 boys describing the play in question in only negative terms and giving it very modest or low ratings.

The high mean ratings for Dance and Drama+music may partly reflect the possibility of unreliable means for small groups. In the latter case, however, the high value certainly also results from the fact that most experiences concerned a rather special event (the mean for the "Cats-experiences" in London, taken separately, was as high as 8,81).

The aesthetic areas were compared regarding the distribution of high vs. low ratings around the general median value of 8.00 (e.g. for Music there were 106 strength ratings above or equal to 8 vs. 54 ratings under 8; corresponding numbers for Drama were 50 vs. 48). A clearly significant overall difference was noted, with a  $\chi^2 = 18.84$ , significant at the one per cent level ( $df=7$ ; if also the category of non-aesthetic experiences is included, the  $\chi^2$ -value raises to 23.56;  $df$  now=8,  $p$  still  $<.01$ ).

Similar median tests for differences between genders and residence areas suggest that girls' experiences are, on the whole, stronger, and that ratings tend to correlate positively with degree of urbanization. Boys' and girls' ratings differ even at the 0.001 level ( $\chi^2=13.30$ ,  $df=1$ ; with non-aesthetic experiences included  $\chi^2=25.67$ ), and the ratings of the three residence groups at the .01 level, mainly because of the higher ratings in the capital ( $\chi^2=11.31$ ,  $df=2$ ; including non-aesthetic experiences  $\chi^2=16.61$ ,  $p$  now  $<.001$ ).

### **Frequencies and strength of experiences for different modes of confronting drama**

Table 2 contains results only for drama experiences. Besides data relevant for the above-mentioned purpose 2, regarding the role of different modes of confronting drama, it also presents general strength means for the different genders and residence areas. Experiences representing film viewing and attending musicals in the mixed category Drama+music has now been left out, not only because they

were not "pure" drama experiences, but also because they were rather few and mostly comprised reactions to one single musical in a rather special context (cf. the last paragraph of this Result-section for some comments on these experiences). The 6 evident cases of video watching were referred to the same category as the TV-experiences. All of the categories 1-3 in the table represent only "receptive" confrontation.

Table 2. Frequencies, percentages and strength ratings of drama experiences according to residence area, gender and mode of confrontation.

Mode of confrontation :	Countryside		Towns		Capital		All regions		Strength rating mean
	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	
1 Cinema	1 10	3 21	3 12	4 17	5 45	11 65	9 19	18 33	8.35
2 TV/video	6 60	8 57	6 23	4 17	5 45	1 6	17 36	13 24	6.96
3 Live drama	2 20	- -	13 50	12 52	1 9	4 24	16 34	16 30	7.14
4 Acting	- -	- -	1 4	3 13	- -	- -	1 2	3 6	8.87
5 Other, unclear	1 10	3 21	3 12	- -	- -	1 6	4 9	4 7	7.41
TOTAL	10	14	26	23	11	17	47	54	

Strength rating means for all drama experiences, according to gender and area of residence :

Boys	Girls	Countryside	Towns	Capital
6.84	8.08	7.13	7.35	8.05

The small subgroups should caution against making far-reaching interpretations of the results, and the overrepresentation of live experiences in towns must be held in mind especially in this table. However, these conclusions may be reasonably valid regarding the frequencies in the table :

- The degree of urbanization correlates positively with the frequencies of cinema experiences, negatively with those of TV/video experiences. The percentages of reported cinema experiences in the capital (45% and 65%) are mostly ca. 3-4 times as high as those in other subgroups, while the video experiences in the countryside are so numerous that they constitute the majority of experiences (60 ; 57).
- Girls in all residence areas consistently report more cinema experiences and fewer TV/video experiences than boys.
- The number of reported experiences resulting from acting is strikingly low (4). For reasons suggested above, most reports of live confrontation regarded school theatre; in fact, only 7 reports, 4 of which were written by pupils in the capital, concerned ordinary theatre visits.

The means of the strength ratings show considerable differences, especially for cinema vs. TV/video (cinema mean 1.39 higher), but also for girls vs. boys (girls' mean 1.24 higher). When median tests are carried out, the corresponding differences are both significant at the one per cent level. A barely significant overall difference (p almost exactly .05) is noted between the three residence areas, but the difference between the capital and the combined group of countryside and towns is more clearly significant (p<.02; the 4 pupils in the acting category were excluded in these two comparisons, because they all represented towns and thus were not distributed over different residence areas). These partly rather distinctive differences and high significance levels deserve some notice, also because there are certain conditions that should actually work against such clear-cut results: the restricted variation (no means clearly below 7, no medians below 7.5), the rather small subgroups, the probably not very high reliability of the ratings, the modest sensitivity of the nonparametric significance test used. The just-mentioned general trends, especially those regarding genders and cinema vs. TV/video, also

appear to be rather consistent for different subgroups, but such analyses are, of course, complicated by the often very low number of observations. In the first subgroup of country boys, for example, a difference between the mean ratings of 9.0 and 6.8 for cinema vs. TV/video experiences might seem quite convincing, but these values are calculated for only 1(!) and 6 pupils, respectively.

Although the pupils in the acting category were utterly few, their high ratings (range: 8.5-10) should perhaps receive some attention.

Table 3. Chi<sup>2</sup>-tests of significance for the relationship between strength ratings and place of residence, gender and mode of confrontation. The cross tables indicate the number of pupils rating their experience either lower or higher than/equal to the median rating in each case.

	<7.5	≥7.5	Tot		<8	≥8	Tot	
Countryside	13	11	24	chi <sup>2</sup> = 6.36	Boys	29	17	46
Towns	24	18	42	df = 2	Girls	18	34	52
Capital	8	20	28	<b>p = .05</b>				<b>p &lt; .01</b>
	<7.5	≥7.5	Tot		<8	≥8	Tot	
Countrys.+towns	37	29	66	chi <sup>2</sup> = 5.95	Cinema	7	20	27
Capital	8	20	28	df=1	TV/Video	20	10	30
				<b>p &lt; .02</b>				chi <sup>2</sup> = 9.46
								df = 1
								<b>p &lt;.01</b>

## Characteristics of films and plays

In studying the characteristics of the films and plays confronted by the pupils, the film and theatre experiences were kept apart, mainly because most of the latter ones represented only two plays, chosen by the schools rather than by the pupils.

### Films

Of the 57 subjects included in categories 1-2 (cinema-TV/video) in table 2, four gave no information about the films in question. Of the remaining 53 pupils, 48 either mentioned the names of the films referred to, or otherwise (11 cases) described them in a way which made their general character quite clear, denoting them with genre terms (such as "a horror film", "a comedy" . . .), describing them as, e.g., a depressing story with a tragic end, or the like.

Although Swedish was the mother tongue of most pupils and many of them also had at least a good knowledge of Finnish, only four of the films described and identified by name were of Nordic origin, i.e. the Swedish productions *Fucking Åmål*, *Jerusalem* and a TV-dramatization treating the murder of prime minister Palme, and the Finnish film *Ambush* (it may be noted that foreign films are not generally dubbed to any of the official languages in Finland).

As to target audience, films which could be regarded as typical "youth films" were rather rare: the only more evident cases were *Fucking Åmål* and a film about young people preparing a musical together. Two films, *Dead Poets Society* and *Titanic*, also had central teenage role characters. If any of the described films would be classified as "family films", made to suite also children and very young people, an animated film with children in the (cinema) audience may be a case in question, as well as a film about *Lassie* (on TV) and a very similar "dog story" related in an episode of a rerun of the TV-series *Little House on the Prairie*.

Television series of the soap opera or other types played no important role; in fact, the two above-mentioned TV-productions were the only evident cases in question. The films watched via TV

generally were feature films originally premiered on cinemas.

The films causing drama experiences, thus, mostly were Anglo-American full-length films, mainly intended for adult audiences. The extended time-span of the project probably contributed to the very great variation of films. Only a few films were mentioned by more than one pupil (and then only by two pupils, i.e., *Dances with Wolves*, *Fucking Åmål*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *JFK*, *Titanic*; possibly also *Jesus from Nazareth*, although one subject's description of a film about Jesus was somewhat unclear).

Regarding their content, only two of the 48 films mentioned by name or satisfactorily described seemed to be clear-cut comedies (one was a *Sister Act* version). Five of them were described as typical horror films, e.g. *Child's Play*, and two as less typical ones: *The Silence of the Lambs* and the horror slapstick *Braindead*. The war films mentioned were *Full Metal Jacket*, *Save Private Ryan* and *Ambush* (the two latter given as exemplifications by a girl attracted by historical films); also *Independence Day* and *The last of the Mohicans* are clearly related to this category. Two pupils, evidently with good reason, denoted the films they described "action films", a genre to which also *Heat* could be referred. Three films treating criminal deeds and milieus in less action-like manners were the docudrama about the Palme murder and another one about tracing and capturing poachers, as well as *Carlito's way*; *The Shawshank Redemption* and *JFK* also has some connection to this area of content. The two pupils describing films about Jesus were the only ones to report reactions to religious-biblical films.

The remaining films could be seen as generally representing the drama genre, with a great variation of themes, sometimes including elements of phantasy, adventure, disaster etc. Of all these, 7 films contain clearly tragical elements (two "nameless" films described as tragical or depressing, *Dead Poets Society*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Sommersby*, *The English Patient*, *Titanic*). Several dramas treated close human relations (at least the 5 last-mentioned and *Dolores Claiborn*, *Fucking Åmål*, *Not without my Daughter*, *Will Hunting*), often of a romantic character (the 3 last-mentioned in the former parenthesis and *Forever Young*, *Ghost*, *When a Man loves a Woman*).

Due to the now very small number of subjects in all categories, observations regarding relations between film types and other variables must be made only very tentatively. However, there seemed to be rather clear tendencies for drama film experiences to be more frequent in the capital (11 pupils) than in towns (5) or countryside (4), and also more frequent among girls compared to boys (16 vs. 5) and in the cinema experiences compared to those in front of TV/video (17 vs. 4). If a somewhat loose category is formed of the films which most often depict violent, dreadful or threatening situations, i.e. the horror, war and action films, experiences of these are somewhat more frequent in the countryside (8) than in the capital and towns taken together (3), and clearly more frequent in the TV/video experiences (11 vs. 3 for cinema). On the whole, different types of films were more evenly represented in the TV/video experiences, while the cinema experiences had a heavy focus on drama films. Seven boys reported experiences of war or action films, compared to the single girl referring to two war films as exemplifications. The mean of the strength ratings was highest for drama films (8.4; for the tragical dramas 8.6), followed by those for the five "criminal" films (8.2) and the two "dog stories" (8.0); for all other categories (comedy, biblical, horror, war, action) lower means were noted (6.00-7.25).

All of the general trends above tended to show some consistency for different subgroups, but here, even more than in the case of studying confrontation modes, small frequencies make conclusions about subgroups hazardous. The higher strength rating mean for drama films held up both for boys (8.3 vs. 6.8 for nondrama films) and girls (8.5 vs. 7.5), but there were only 5 boys in the drama/film group. Since the earlier observed higher mean rating for cinema vs. TV/video experiences could possibly be explained away with the fact that drama films (which also get high ratings) were more numerous among the cinema experiences, it would have been especially interesting to compare ratings for the two film media separately within the drama and the non-drama categories, but valid comparisons would of course require more than 4 TV/video experiences in the drama category, and 7

cinema experiences among the nondrama cases. With these data, differences between cinema and TV/video would still remain when the drama-nondrama dimension is controlled for (mean ratings for cinema- and TV/video experiences would be 8.60 and 8.06 within the drama genre, the corresponding difference within the nondrama experiences would be 7.86 - 6.86).

## Plays

The plays referred to by the 32 "Live drama"-subjects in table 2 were, with a few exceptions in the capital, performed by Finland-Swedish theatres. Classifications according to target group, content etc. are of less interest here, because 25 cases evidently considered plays not spontaneously attended by the subjects, but chosen by the schools for class performances. Nearly all of these cases (23) involved town schools, and the play in question was then mostly (21 cases) a dramatization of the childrens' book writer Astrid Lindgren's *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* (Brothers Lionheart), a somewhat sentimental tale with elements of adventure and phantasy, or *Jakten på pärlfiskarna* (The hunt for the pearl fishers), written by the Swede Anders T Peedu and depicting in a rather exaggerated way the moral ruin and harsh fate of a young drug addict.

Of the 7 pupils whose theatre experiences did not relate to school-arranged performances, no one attended a countryside school and 4 were pupils in the capital. The plays identified by name were written for adult or general audiences, and included a comedy, a dramatization of one of Agatha Christie's detective stories, and examples of both classical and modern dramatic art (2 plays of Strindberg, one of Lars Norén).

The average strength rating for the just-mentioned 7 experiences was 7.5, compared to 7.0 for the class performances arranged by the schools. Of these latter, the experiences of the anti-drug play received an average strength rating of 7.25, compared to 6.3 for those of the Lionheart-play.

Of the 4 pupils reporting experiences of own acting, one referred to acting on the stage in general, and the plays in the other 3 cases did certainly not belong to the common repertoire. Two of the plays were evidently rehearsed in the schools to be performed in public.

## Contextual aspects

The pupils were also asked to describe and comment on the possible importance of contextual details of the situations surrounding the experiences. Here, fairly complete information was obtained only regarding the *persons involved* in the situation. Slightly more than half of the TV/video-experiences (17/30) were solitary, while experiences in the other confrontation modes were always reported to have taken place in someone's company. Most of the theatrical performances were attended together with other pupils in one's class (or grade) on occasions arranged by the schools (cf. above). For both TV/video-, cinema- and theatre experiences, high strength ratings were generally noted for experiences shared with one close friend or one or a few family members. The mean rating for these cases amounted to 8.8, compared to 6.9 for the solitary experiences and 7.2 both for experiences together with 2-5 companions and experiences on school-arranged occasions.

As a contextual factor one could also consider the extent to which viewing a certain film or play is an act of the *spectator's own choice*, spontaneous or preplanned. The just-mentioned higher ratings for experiences shared with fewer and more intimate persons could reflect the probable fact that these pupils had exerted a considerable personal influence on the choice of the films or plays. An ordinary cinema and theatre visit, moreover, mostly implies explicit pondering beforehand. The great proportion of solitary TV-experiences accords with the reasonable assumption that the teenagers' possibilities to choose independently from the great supply of films on TV should be fairly good. The strength ratings for these experiences were, however, low (cf. above). In the 6 cases of video watching, when the

films thus had been especially selected in advance, the ratings were even lower both for private and shared watching (ratings 4-7), except in a case of viewing together with one's brother (8.5).

The importance of experiences *related to the school* is of special paedagogical interest and has some relevance also for the just-mentioned aspect, because in these cases the pupils' influence on the choice of plays or films had probably mostly been minimal. Besides the 25 experiences of school theatre performances already mentioned, 3 pupils had viewed films on class visits to cinema (Fucking Åmål) or in the school auditorium (Dead Poets Society), and two of the experiences of own acting were evidently related to plays rehearsed in school. All these 30 experiences constitute just under 30 per cent of the total number of drama experiences. The 5 school-related experiences of films or own acting all received remarkably high strength ratings (8.5-10). Incidentally, the school representations also illustrate that pupils' ratings for the same dramatic material may vary widely. The two lowest ratings for 7 experiences of Brothers Lionheart were 4 and 5, the highest 8.5 and 9, while the corresponding values for 11 rated experiences of the Peeder play were 4-6, and 9-10 (the ratings of 4 expressed explicitly negative attitudes to the boringness of the former play, the obscene language of the latter).

In most other respects, subjects' information about the context of the experiences was rather meager. The "atmosphere" of the situation was mentioned in one cinema and seven theatre experiences, and the average strength rating for these latter, i.e. 7.7 clearly exceeded that of theatre experiences generally. The darkness of a TV/video-watching situation was mentioned in a few cases, and in two of these darkness was pointed out as a factor generally enhancing the watching experience. Somewhat similarly, two pupils reporting cinema experiences mentioned the moment when the lights are turned off and the audience gets silent; one of these considered this a crucial moment and made a further little digression regarding the capacity of the large illuminated screen along with the surrounding darkness and silence to strengthen the experience, especially compared with watching TV.

### Some comparisons with music experiences

According to purpose 5, the results regarding different modes of confronting dramatic art were compared with the corresponding results noted for the music area. The outcome of this comparison, in turn, invites a few observations regarding certain qualitative differences between music and drama experiences.

In table 4, all "non-live" receptive experiences of music or drama have been classed together in category no. 1. In category 2 the upward bias of the live drama experiences should be held in mind. Since the one experience per subject-principle applies also to the music experiences, the pupils representing the two experience areas constitute separate groups.

Table 4. Music and drama experiences according to mode of confrontation

Mode of confrontation	Music experiences			Drama experiences		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1 Technically reproduced music (radio, CD, music video) or drama (cinema, TV)	41	49	84	26	31	57
2 Attending live music/drama performance	7	20	42	16	16	32
3 Productive activity (singing, playing, composing etc. / acting)	20	24	35	1	2	3
4 Other, unclear	5	6	7	4	9	8
TOTAL	83	85	168	47	54	101

The clearly most pronounced difference between the two experience areas is the higher proportion of significant experiences relating to one's own productive activity in the music area (21% vs. 4% for the total groups). Focusing somewhat closer on aspects of overt activity, one could note that also many of the "receptive" music experiences (categories 1-2) were accompanied by some kind of behavioural reactions. 11 pupils reported that listening to some recorded music also made them sing or dance or try to play the same music, or initiated painting or poem-writing, and 12 of the pupils reporting rock concert experiences mentioned behaviours such as singing and shouting, dancing and jumping, stage-diving, crowd-surfing etc. No obvious corresponding behaviours were mentioned in the film and theatre experiences, except for one case in which a TV-film inspired a girl to dance. Thus, more than a third of the music experiences were connected with productive or other kinds of manifest activities. Regarding qualitative characteristics, the just-mentioned music-related activities were often of a *social* kind, implying collaboration, common expression of emotions (besides ordinary applause after entrances or performances) or interaction between members of an audience or between performers and their audience. Thus, 19 of the 35 productive music experiences represented singing or playing together with others, and the suggested rock concert-behaviours (singing, jumping etc.) were mostly described as common activities and commonly shared experiences; a few pupils also mentioned backstage- and other informal contacts with performers, as well as artists' gestures towards the audience (such as throwing their plectra).

Two qualitative characteristics were rather specifically connected with productive behaviour, and were thus also clearly more frequently represented in the music area. One was that of *creativity*. Composing, improvising or inventing song lyrics was explicitly referred to in the reports of 8 music experiences, and probably the 11 pupils describing performances or rehearsals with their own rock bands must have been involved in some arranging, composing and similar activities, although these were not, with one exception, separately mentioned. Of the drama experiences, only one contained clearly creative elements (i.e. improvising while acting). Another characteristic of the productive music experiences was the occurrence of "*ego-bolstering*" feelings: feelings of artistic or personal competency, self-confidence and self-development, sense of being appreciated etc. At least about half (18/35) of the productive music experiences obviously contained such elements (expressing, e.g., self-esteem when singing or playing well, when discovering latent musical abilities in oneself, when getting positive response from listeners). Also in 4 music listening experiences, the music was reported to evoke strength and self-confidence. Among the drama experiences only few similar reactions were noted, i.e. two subjects' feelings of proudness or success when acting, and a third one's heightened self-assurance after identifying with the leading character in *Fucking Åmål*.

Regarding strength ratings, it could be seen as a parallel with some results for drama experiences, that the highest mean of 8.3 (cf. Finnäs 2006 p. 323) in the musical area was noted for the productive mode, and the lowest of 7.7 for audiovisual reception, mostly implying music video watching.

### **Additional observations**

#### Total number of drama-related experiences

The 100 drama experiences in table 1 do not include that of a pupil with unknown area of residence. Moreover, 9 other subjects, mostly classified in the music, literature or "other aesthetic" areas, also made references to dramatic art, e.g. by describing a reading experience which then had elicited an interest for a certain film, by mentioning film or theatre as only one example of one's interests in arts, or by remembering watching a TV-film as a background element in a primarily non-aesthetic experience. When also the 17 cases of music+drama experiences are added to all these, one gets 127 as a total number of subjects reporting experiences representing dramatic art in some way,



amounting to about 16.5% of all pupils. It should be mentioned that this does not strengthen the position of dramatic art relative to other experience areas, because also for these areas additional experiences could be calculated on similar grounds. Especially regarding music, many experiences which were not categorised in the music area, still clearly contained music at least as a background element.

### Questionnaire data

According to the questionnaire administered before the writing of the reports, music listening was the clearly most frequent activity (81 % listening "every day"). Music video watching (32%) and staying outdoors to enjoy nature (30%) came next, followed by "watching plays or films on TV or video", with 28% watching every day and 33% "several times a week". Only 14 subjects, 9 of them in the capital, reported "visiting theatre or cinema" every week, while 236, i.e. 31%, chose the every month-alternative. Also here, the influence of the residence area was evident: of all the monthly visitors only 34 pupils (14%) lived in the countryside, while 99 ones represented the capital (42%; the pupils in the capital constituted only 26% of the total sample). Regarding productive pursuits, acting was one of the less popular ones, reported by 56 pupils (11 boys + 45 girls, 7%), again with an under- and overrepresentation of countryside and capital subjects (11 and 29%, respectively).

### The experiences of drama+music

Of the 17 experiences named "Drama+music" in table 1, 15 involved some musical or (1 case) operetta, attended as live performances in all cases but one. 11 pupils' descriptions were related to the same, earlier mentioned, performance of *Cats*. Moreover, a boy reported his reactions to the film about *The Doors* on video, and another one described his particular fascination for music in sci-fi films. The strength ratings were mostly rather high, especially for the *Cats* performances (average: 8.81). Four pupils noted elements connected with the atmosphere of live performances (of *Cats* and the operetta), such as a nice interior milieu of the theatre, the presence of expectant and dressed-up people, a numerous audience, and expressions of acclamation and enthusiasm.

## DISCUSSION

### The main results - summary and comments

On the whole, music seemed to be the "art area" generating most and strongest significant experiences among the studied teenagers. Drama could pretend to have been the next most important area in urban regions, although among the girls its position in this respect was seriously challenged by the literature area. The relative position of drama was strongest in the countryside, where the percentages of drama experiences also were almost exactly comparable to those in the capital. In some general and purely quantitative sense, then, drama could perhaps be seen as a relatively "democratic" area: while a lower availability of music activities, concerts and music shops may contribute to fewer significant music experiences in rural areas, a scarcity of theatres and cinemas may be compensated for by the easy access to drama through audiovisual equipment in one's own home environment.

It should be pointed out that the accessibility of both music and film has been even more facilitated by an increased use of digital techniques and the Internet in the years since these data were collected. It is hard to see why this development should have changed the relations between music and drama as areas for significant experiences, but it seems possible that it has given both these areas an increased

advantage in this respect over other ones, e.g., literature, visual art and nature.

Regarding different *modes of confrontation*, the low number of experiences involving ordinary (i.e. not school-arranged) attending of live drama is striking, and even more so is the rareness of experiences related to own acting. These observations are further accentuated by the comparisons with the music area, which probably, for a number of reasons, offers better opportunities on these points than drama. The supply of live pop and rock concerts, for example, is greater than that of theatrical plays intended for a teenage audience, and the concerts mostly take place in an atmosphere encouraging overt expression and sharing of feelings and youthful spontaneous behaviours, both music-related or others, as suggested above. The low frequency of acting (c.f the questionnaire and earlier studies) and of significant experiences involving acting may have something to do with the fact that staging plays mostly requires some special initiatives and arrangements, and that acting is easily perceived as a somewhat frightening "solistic" performance in front of potentially critical spectators. Music, on the other hand, may be conveniently learned and practised also privately and informally, and only to one's own and perhaps a few others' amusement; amateur music performances in public often also imply a not too demanding collective situation, where one sings or plays simultaneously, often in unison, with at least some of one's co-performers. The high strength ratings for the few experiences of acting should perhaps be noted for similar reasons as the high ratings for both the "productive" music experiences and possibly also the dance experiences (mean rating 8.5), of which practically all involved own dancing activity. It seems of course reasonable that one's own activity should especially often be related to clearly and deeply felt experiences, and the feelings of self-development, competence and social appreciation that evidently often accompany such experiences may be particularly important in the life of teenagers.

The easy accessibility of dramatic material on TV is reflected by the fact that a clear majority of the pupils watch film or theatre on TV or video at least "several times a week". Equally frequent cinema visits occur only rarely, but of the reported "non-live" experiences those related to cinema are nevertheless nearly as many as those related to TV/video, and get a clearly higher mean rating. It is not possible here to make conclusions regarding the extent to which such results may be explained by factors related to the physical or social watching situation, to spectators' sense of commitment, or perhaps to the fact that films on cinema often are recently premiered and specially advertised productions, thus giving raise to particular interest and positive expectations. Generally, the just-mentioned findings accord well with Antoni's (2007) earlier cited ones, which at the same time seem to confirm that cinema is still today a most potent medium also for young people's film experiences.

When *background variables* are considered, the above-mentioned regional "democracy" regarding drama experiences does not pertain to the confrontation modes. The high frequencies of cinema experiences in the capital, as well as the commonness of video experiences and scarcity of experiences of "nonobligatory" theatre visits in the countryside, certainly mirror inequalities regarding the access to theatres and cinemas. The consistent gender differences concerning experiences of cinema vs. TV/video have less obvious reasons, but might partly depend on a greater tendency among the girls to seek the generally more intense feelings experienced at the cinema. Boys generally seem to be less sensible to experiences in aesthetic areas, judging from their often lower strength ratings and their tendency, particularly in the less urbanized places of residence, to report no experiences at all in aesthetic areas. This may, among other things, reflect a clinging to traditional masculine roles, prevailing above all in more rural regions.

A view on the *films and plays referred to* in these teenagers' descriptions revealed a broad spectrum of types and contents. Generally they made, if the school-arranged theatre performances are left out, a rather "mature" impression, and most of them represented such works for an adult audience, which often have attracted attention from the public and the critics, have received or been nominated for awards etc. Many of them fell within the category of drama, which also was noted for

the highest strength rating mean. In the everyday sense of this word, almost all of these films and plays could perhaps be regarded as more or less "dramatic", i.e. containing elements of suspense, danger, emotional themes etc; sheer comedies did not seem to be an important source of experiences. Regarding background variables, the gender differences largely run parallel to earlier results concerning male preferences (for action, war etc.) vs. female ones (mainly for drama). The reason for the higher number of experiences involving drama films in the capital is unclear; perhaps the higher socio-economic level of a capital population promotes an interest for more "weighty" films, or perhaps a large supply of cinema films in some region often has a certain focus on the drama genre, quantitatively and/or regarding advertising and other forms of publicity. The results could possibly imply that a massive and varied supply of different types of films on TV invites many but often not very strong experiences, while a more distinctly drama-centered supply of cinema films increases the chances for getting more profound film experiences.

Regarding *contextual aspects* mentioned by the pupils, the conclusive findings were few. The great proportion of solitary TV/video experiences could indicate the advantage of not being disturbed by family members in the domestic watching situation. The highest strength ratings were generally noted for experiences had in the company of one or two close friends or relatives, a social situation which probably often implies a special sense of common commitment and intimately shared feelings. For above-stated reasons, experiences related to the school context were misleadingly numerous, and a few expressly negative ones points to the difficulty of choosing theatrical plays suitable for all pupils. On the whole, however, these experiences also document the undoubted possibilities of schools to arrange for conditions favouring significant drama experiences. It could have some relevance for such arrangements to note that factors of "atmosphere" were almost always mentioned only for experiences outside one's own school.

The most obvious outcomes of the *comparisons of drama and music experiences* were already touched upon when commenting on the general findings and on those regarding confrontation modes, but the greater occurrence of overt social and collaborative behaviour and of creative activities in the music experiences could still be mentioned.

### **Some implications for education and cultural work**

The results indicate that young people should be offered possibilities not least for significant experiences involving theatre attending and own acting. Regarding acting, this points to the importance of drama education and of theatre, filmmaking and similar projects in the school. These should, ideally, provide opportunities not only for self-knowledge and self-expression, but also for making contributions to the general theatrical culture of the school and the local community, and for experiencing such feelings of success and appreciation from both oneself and others, that often accompany own performing activities. Objectives of these latter types call for approaches which, more than much traditional drama education, are orientated towards teaching of acting skills and understanding of dramatic art, and performing in front of audiences (cf. the perhaps somewhat polemically overemphasized distinction between traditional "drama in education" vs. "drama education located in the public world", made by Hornbrook 1998, e.g. 130-131, 138-141). Activities initiated or encouraged by private groups or community agencies outside school are also important, and sometimes perhaps even more efficient at motivating young people to perform theatre together. Jönsson e.a. describes two cases of such groups, of which one indicates that even little interest in school activities or in ordinary theatre visits do not necessarily exclude teenage boys' wholehearted and regular engagement in local amateur theatrical projects (Jönsson e.a. 1993, 108-110, 157-158). Regarding school-related initiatives, Nilsson (1998, 84) notes how the usual gender difference, with girls more often playing theatre, was eliminated in a community where a special theatrical culture

traditionally existed in one of the schools.

Theatre visits arranged by the schools is a natural way of trying to encourage young people's interest in attending live theatre performances. Here, also some results in this study point to the possible problem of finding plays which appeal to all members of a young auditory. When possible, the pupils themselves could participate in the choice of plays, or different groups of pupils could even, perhaps as a kind of "homework", visit different plays (including musicals etc.) according to their own wishes. Regarding the alternatives of visits to theatres vs. visits of theatres to schools, it could be noted that the former alternative is the one towards which the pupils should be socialized as future culture consumers, and also the one where attenders' experiences more often are enhanced by elements of "atmosphere" and expectation. Most generally, serious endeavours of this kind should be realized along with some kind of "audience development" work, involving both preparative and follow-up activities with the pupils, preferably in collaboration with the theatres in question (for a recent contribution, cf. Lund 2008, which also addresses problems created by the sometimes conflicting preferences and expectations of the three counterparts involved: the theatre, the school, the young audience).

Regarding films, technical media are of course well adapted for presenting films also in schools, and the chances for resulting significant experiences will probably be greater, the more "cinema-like" these presentations are regarding screen sizes, lighting conditions, having some "special event"-character etc. Here, there should be no notable problems to find interesting films, and the selection of these could be steered towards films of the types that often also awake deep experiences. The convenience of using audiovisual presentations in schools should not, however, divert attention from the possibilities of making visits to cinemas, both for the potential value of experiencing the films and in order to keep pupils in touch with traditional cinematic culture, which still may have much to offer as an arena for drama experiences. Also here, principles of audience development should be applied (for a detailed report of a British project involving school-cinema collaboration in rural areas, cf. BFI 2000).

The results regarding the background variables in this study point especially to the insufficient access to cinema and theatre experiences in less urbanized regions. In these, school- or community-initiated projects and audience development measures of the kind suggested above may be especially important. Regarding the general access to cinema experiences, moreover, it seems that the application of modern digital techniques (cf. so-called e-cinema), together with broadband or satellite data transmission, could radically increase the possibilities for cinematic presentation of films also outside densely populated areas, given that such initiatives are supported by cultural and other community authorities. There seems to be a need for developing more aesthetic sensitivity in boys, partly by efforts to relax stereotyped masculine roles, e.g. by using male teenage idols or peers as "models" (regarding drama experiences: popular male actors, young boys interested in theatre, etc.). Some of the research references cited above, i.e. the Jönsson, Nilsson and BFI studies, are directly relevant also for factors concerning gender and area of residence.

### **Implications for further research**

Research regarding "strong" or "significant" experiences evidently will continue to be of interest, not only because such experiences are important per se, but also because this kind of studies may direct attention to the importance of other aspects of experiences than may mere studies of leisure activities.

Methodologically, the current study suggests that collecting written reports during group sessions may be a practicable way to secure data about teenagers' significant experiences in aesthetic areas, but it also illustrates some problems with this method, involving, e.g., reports of irrelevant experiences, and

data that are often more meager than those resulting from studies which also apply interviews or more structured questionnaires.

On the whole, it seems that experimental research, and perhaps empirical research generally, has had no strong position in studying film and theatre experiences (cf. the observations regarding "positivist methodology", made by Petro 2000, 577-578). For example, it is surprising to find no published experimental comparisons between different ways of film watching, although it should be quite feasible to have comparable groups of persons watch the same films via different media (computer screen, TV-set, cinema or cinema-like conditions, etc.).

In many audience development- and similar projects, some kind of action research would be a suitable approach, with successive stages of planning, action, evaluation, re-planning etc. in close cooperation with all the persons involved.

There is plenty of room for both quantitative and qualitative research on the current problem issues. Qualitative approaches, however, are of special importance in studies of strong or significant experiences, because they may provide more detailed information concerning the specific factors and conditions contributing to the particular impact made by the stimuli, situations or actions in question. Also in the future analyses of the data in this study, the next stage will involve closer analyses of qualitative elements in the pupils' experiences.

It should be clear that results obtained for a specific population in a particular social and cultural context can not easily be generalized. Among older persons who have left the teenage culture and started occupational careers, for example, music may perhaps no more be the area generating most significant experiences. The only solution to such generalization problems is simply to perform separate studies for the separate populations of interest; studies, which may of course differ considerably regarding methods and procedures, depending on the subjects' ability to analyze and express their own feelings and reactions, to communicate personally with researchers, etc.

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