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Corina Caduff | Tan Wälchli | Eds.

ARTISTIC RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

Wilhelm Fink

Artistic Research and Literature

Corina Caduff, Tan Wälchli (Eds.)

Artistic Research and Literature

Wilhelm Fink

Publiziert mit Unterstützung des Schweizerischen Nationalfonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung.



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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846763339>

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

© 2019 Wilhelm Fink Verlag, ein Imprint der Brill Gruppe
(Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, Niederlande; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Deutschland)

www.fink.de

Cover image: Konrad Bayer, *flucht (lesesäule)* (1964). © bpk / Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Archiv

Cover design: Evelyn Ziegler, München

Proof reader: Margret Westerwinter, Düsseldorf

Production: Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn

ISBN 978-3-7705-6333-3 (hardback)

ISBN 978-3-8467-6333-9 (e-book)

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Contributors

Jan Baetens

is professor of Cultural and Literary Studies at the University of Leuven. His research focuses on word and image studies as well as on contemporary French poetry and literature. Some recent publications are: *Pour en finir avec la poésie dite minimaliste* (2014), *A Voix haute. Poésie et lecture publique* (2016), and *The Graphic Novel* (2015), co-authored with Hugo Frey. He is also a published poet, author of some fifteen collections, among which *Ce Monde* (2015) and *La Lecture* (Fantin-Latour, 1870, 1877), co-authored with Milan Chlumsky. His first novel, *Faire sécession*, has appeared in 2017.

Vincent Broqua

is professor of North American Literature and Arts at the University of Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis where he teaches in the English department as well as in the Creative Writing MA. He is co-head of the research programmes “Poets and critics” and “Translating performance/performing translation.” He published *A partir de rien: esthétique, poétique et politique de l'infini* in 2013. He is the co-editor in chief of *Revue Française d'Etudes Americaines* and *Quaderna*. Relevant for this publication is his co-edition of an issue of *Formes poétiques contemporaines* on “Contemporary critical forms.” His creative books include *Récupérer* (Petits Matins, 2015), *même=same* (Contrat Maint, 2013), and *Given* (Contrat Maint, 2009). He translated the works of artists and experimental poets such as David Antin, Jim Dine, Claude Rutault, and Anne Waldman.

Kathrin Busch

is professor at the Berlin University of the Arts. She studied philosophy, art history, and literature in Hamburg and was awarded a PhD at the Ruhr University of Bochum for her thesis on Jacques Derrida. She was subsequently junior professor at the University of Lüneburg and taught as professor for Art Theory at the Merz Academy in Stuttgart. Her research focuses on contemporary French philosophy and aesthetics, mainly on questions of artistic research and theories of passivity. Selected publications: *Andrea Winkler* (Köln, 2017, ed.), *Anderes Wissen* (München, 2016, ed.), *P – Passivität* (Hamburg, 2012), *Geschicktes Geben. Aporien der Gabe bei Jacques Derrida* (München, 2004). <https://www.udk-berlin.de/personen/detailansicht/person/kathrin-busch>

Corina Caduff

studied German Literature in Zurich and received her PhD on Elfriede Jelinek in 1991. She then worked as a journalist for radio and as a scholar at the University

of Zurich with guest lectureships in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Chicago. The habilitation on “Literarisierung von Musik und bildender Kunst” took place in Berlin in 2001. 2004–2017 she was Professor at Zurich University of the Arts. Since 2018 she has been vice-rector research at Bern University of Applied Sciences as well as a cultural scientist at Bern University of the Arts. Research interests include the relationship of arts, music, and literature; artistic research; death and dying. She is co-editor of the volume *Art and Artistic Research* (Zurich 2010) and author of several articles about artistic research. Moreover, in recent years, she published three volumes of essays (*Land in Aufruhr*, 2007; *Kränken und Anerkennen*, 2010; *Szenen des Todes*, 2013). <https://corinacaduff.ch>

Daniela Cascella

is an Italian writer. She is the author of *Singed. Muted Voice-Transmissions, After the Fire* (Equus Press, 2017), *F.M.R.L. Footnotes, Mirages, Refrains and Leftovers of Writing Sound* (Zero Books, 2015), and *En Abîme: Listening, Reading, Writing. An Archival Fiction* (Zero Books, 2012). She edits *Untranslated at Minor Literature(s)* and has published in international magazines such as *The Los Angeles Review of Books, Music and Literature, Gorse, 3:AM Magazine*. An independent researcher, she has taught in institutions such as the Bergen Academy of Fine Art and Design, Goldsmiths University of London, Oxford Brookes University, and she is an associate lecturer in the MA Sound Arts at LCC/University of the Arts London. www.danielacascella.com

Alexander Damianisch

is director of the “Zentrum Fokus Forschung,” a research centre at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, as well as the head of the department “Support Art and Research.” He was inaugural manager for the Programme for Artistic Research at the Austrian Science Fund. He studied literature and history at the Universities of Vienna and Paris (Sorbonne), concluding his studies with a doctoral degree. Additionally, he holds a Master of Advanced Studies in Arts Management (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna). He is a re-elected member of the executive board of the Society for Artistic Research. He is a delegate to the Austrian Science Fund and vice president of ARTist, a society supporting postgraduates.

Maria Fusco

is Professor of Interdisciplinary Writing at Northumbria University, previously Director of Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her latest work *ECZEMA!* (National Theatre Wales, 2018) is a lifelong argument between a man

and a pipe organ. *Legend of the Necessary Dreamer* (London: Vanguard Editions, 2017) was described by Chris Kraus as “a new classic of female philosophical fiction” and of *Give Up Art: Collected Critical Writings* (Los Angeles, CA, Vancouver: New Documents, 2017) James Elkins has written “After a book like this, most nonfiction seems curiously unaware of what writing can be.” *Master Rock* is an experimental radio play performed and recorded inside a mountain, commissioned by Artangel and BBC Radio 4, and has been experienced by more than 2.5 million listeners. Maria’s other solo-authored books are *With A Bao A Qu Reading When Attitudes Become Form* (Los Angeles, CA, Vancouver: New Documents, 2013), *Gonda*, 2012 and *The Mechanical Copula*, 2011 (both published Berlin, New York, NY: Sternberg Press) and she is editorial director of *The Happy Hypocrite*, a cross-genre journal for and about experimental writing. She was the inaugural writer-in-residence at Kadist Art Foundation (Paris), Lisbon Architecture Triennale, and Whitechapel Gallery (London).

Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes

is professor and chair of Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Amsterdam. She studied at the Universities of Heidelberg, London, and Cologne, where she gained her PhD in 2000. It was researched with a James Joyce Foundation Scholarship in Zurich and followed by a post-doctoral fellowship at University College Dublin. She has curated exhibitions internationally. Her research focuses on word and image studies, particularly the visual legacies of (Irish) writers (Joyce, Beckett, Sebald), also considering performance, the historiography of art (Warburg, Giedion-Welcker) curation (literary art exhibitions) and artistic research. Rooted in Joseph Beuys studies, she has an interest in sculpture, performance, social practices, as well as post-war art histories.

Anneleen Masschelein

is associate professor in Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Leuven. She teaches cultural semiotics, literary theory, and cultural studies. Her book *The Unconcept. The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory* appeared in 2011 with State University of New York Press and presents the first genealogy of the Freudian ‘Unheimliche’ in French, English, and German theory. Since then, she has published on a wide range of topics such as the literary interview, writing manuals for detective fiction, auto-biography, Sophie Calle, and Patti Smith for journals like *Poetics Today* and *Life Writing*. She is currently preparing a book on literary advice culture and a special issue on the literary interview for *Biography*.

Tine Melzer

is an artist and researcher with a focus on language. She studied fine arts and philosophy in Amsterdam and was a resident at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten. She received her PhD from the University of Plymouth, UK, in 2014 after researching Ludwig Wittgenstein meeting Gertrude Stein. Tine Melzer taught at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam and various academies and universities throughout Europe since 2004. She teaches at the transdisciplinary Y Institute of the HKB (Bern University of the Arts), at the MA Contemporary Arts Practice and the Fine Arts department, and commenced a research project at the HKB in 2017. Her work has been exhibited and published internationally. Rollo Press published *Taxidermy for Language-Animals—A Book on Stuffed Words* by Tine Melzer, which was selected as one of “The Most Beautiful Swiss Books” 2016.

Fredrik Nyberg

is a writer and text-sound-artist who since his debut in 1998 has published seven collections of poetry and under the name MonoMono three records with sound poetry. The latest poetry collection, *Slingorna & undergången (The Loops & the Extinction)*, came out in 2015. In 2013 he defended his thesis on the topic ‘literary composition’, *Hur låter dikten? Att bli ved II (What is the Sound of the Poem? Becoming Firewood II)* at the University of Gothenburg. Fredrik Nyberg is currently completing a research project with musician/composer Sten Sandell that revolves around pause and silence in the poetic and musical events. The project is part of “Bernadotteprogrammet” and supported by The Royal Swedish Academy of Music. Fredrik Nyberg works as a lecturer in Creative Writing at the Valand Academy at the University of Gothenburg.

Redell Olsen

is a poet and text-based artist. *Film Poems* (Les Figues, 2014) collects the texts for her films and performances from 2007–2012. Some of her previous books include: *Punk Faun: A Bar Rock Pastel* (Subpress, 2012), *Secure Portable Space* (Reality Street, 2004), *Book of the Fur* (rem press, 2000), and, in collaboration with the book artist Susan Johanknecht, *Here Are My Instructions* (Geneva, 2004). From 2006 to 2010 she was the editor of *How2*, the international online journal for Modernist and contemporary writing by women. In 2013 and 2014 she was the Judith E. Wilson visiting fellow in poetry at the University of Cambridge. She is currently professor of Poetry and Poetics at Royal Holloway, University of London. redellolsen.co.uk and filmpoems.wordpress.com/

Maya Rasker

turned her ambition to writing essays, journalism, theatre, and scenario after a career as a creative producer in the film industry. Since her prize-winning debut *Unknown Destination* (2000), her work has been published in the Netherlands, the United States, Spain, Russia, Germany, Hungary, and Turkey. In 2012 she completed her Master in Artistic Research (Universiteit van Amsterdam) with a thesis on the position of the author after publication of the work. As guest lecturer at the Master Film in Amsterdam and other MA and BA art institutes, she designs and teaches courses on writing and (artistic) research, on the transformation of the autobiography, and on the notion of ‘the beginning’ in art production and research. From 2015–2017 she was appointed research coordinator for the School of Media at the University of the Arts Utrecht. A PhD candidate for Leiden University (Academy for the Creative and Performing Arts), Rasker focusses on ‘creative’ writing strategies within artistic research practices.

Ferdinand Schmatz

writes poems, prose, essays, and radio plays. Since 2012 he has been a professor at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, where he directs the Institute for the Language Arts (Creative Writing). His most recent publications include *das gehörte feuer. orphische skizzen* (2016), *auf SÄTZE. Essays zur Poetik, Literatur und Kunst* (ed., 2016); *quellen: gedichte* (2010), and *Durchleuchtung. Ein wilder Roman aus Danja und Franz* (2007). He was awarded the Ernst Jandl Prize in 2009, the H. C. Artmann Prize in 2006, and the Georg Trakl Prize in 2004.

Thomas Strässle

studied German literature, philosophy, and musicology in Zurich, Cambridge, and Paris. He received his PhD from the University of Zurich with a dissertation on Baroque literature in 1999 and his habilitation with a study on the symbolism of salt in European literature in 2008. In addition, he studied the flute with Aurèle Nicolet and earned his concert diploma with distinction. Today he is Head of the interdisciplinary “Y Institute” at Bern University of the Arts and teaches German and Comparative Literature at the University of Zurich. He is president of the Max Frisch Foundation at the ETH Zurich and member of the “Literaturclub” on Swiss TV. His publications include *Gelassenheit. Über eine andere Haltung zur Welt* (Munich: Hanser, 2013) and *Salz. Eine Literaturgeschichte* (Munich: Hanser, 2009).

Salomé Voegelin

is an artist and writer engaged in listening as a sociopolitical practice of sound. Her work and writing deal with sound, and with the world sound makes: its aesthetic, social, and political realities hidden by the persuasiveness of a visual point of view. She is the author of *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound* (Bloomsbury, 2014) and *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (Continuum, 2010). Together with Thomas Gardner, she has co-edited *Colloquium: Sound Art – Music* (ZeroBooks, John Hunt Publishing, 2016). As an artist, she works collaboratively with David Mollin in a practice that focuses on invisible connections, transient behaviour, and unseen rituals, and responds to particular architectural, geographical, or conceptual sites. Voegelin is a reader in Sound Arts at the London College of Communication, UAL.

Tan Wälchli

teaches at the Zurich University of the Arts. At the University of Basel, he is currently completing his *Habilitationschrift* entitled “Kein Reich dieser Welt,” which examines figurations of the theological-political in fantastic narratives by German Romantic authors. His publications include a monograph on Freud and tragedy (2010), a volume on artistic research co-edited with Corina Caduff (2010), as well as scholarly articles on E.T.A. Hoffmann, Heinrich von Kleist, Achim von Arnim and others.

Introducing Literature in the Discourse of Artistic Research

Corina Caduff and Tan Wälchli

The discourse of artistic research emerged in anglophone and Scandinavian countries in the 1990s, initially being established in the Visual Arts departments of art schools. In the wake of the Bologna Process, it spread to many other countries and reached the fields of design, theatre, film, music, and dance. The unification of so many different artistic disciplines under the roof of one discourse represents a great achievement. After long debates about procedures, methods and outcomes of artistic research, and after terminological discussions about *embodied* and *tacit knowledge* as well as *research into art*, *for art*, and *through art*, the field is well-established, both theoretically¹ and institutionally.² It provides rich ground for countless individual works and methodologies, employing a variety of epistemological models as well as trans-disciplinary, collaborative, and participatory practices.³

- 1 See Christopher Frayling, *Research in Art and Design. Royal College of Art Research Papers* 1:1. London: Royal College of Art, 1993; Annette Balkema/Henk Slager, *Artistic Research*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004; Mika Hannula et al., *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices*. Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts, 2005; Robin Nelson, "Practice-as-Research and the Problem of Knowledge," in: *Performance Research* 11: 4 (2006), pp. 105–116; Dieter Lesage/Kathrin Busch, eds., *A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher. The Academy and the Bologna Process*. Antwerp: MuHKA, 2007; Tom Holert, "Being Concerned? Scattered Thoughts on 'Artistic Research' and 'Social Responsibility,'" in: Florian Dombois et al., eds., *Intellectual Birdhouse. Artistic Practice as Research*. London: Koenig Books, 2012, pp. 23–39; Henk Borgdorff, *The Conflict of the Faculties. Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012; Janneke Wesseling, *Of Sponge, Stone and the Intertwinement with the Here and Now. Methodology of Artistic Research*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016.
- 2 James Elkins, *Artists with PhDs. On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2009 gives an overview on PhD programmes in visual arts around the world and discusses some methodological discrepancies. An overview of institutional achievements in the German language area is provided by Sandra Buck et al., "Künstlerische Forschung unter Bildungsperspektive: individualisierte Studienprogramme?," in: *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung* 10:1 (2015), pp. 52–73, <http://www.zfhe.at/index.php/zfhe/article/view/802>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.
- 3 The online *Journal for Artistic Research*, established in 2011, provides insight into the scope of contemporary practices in the field. Cf. <http://www.jar-online.net>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018. For a broad view on various methodological approaches, cf. Jens Badura et al., eds., *Künstlerische Forschung. Ein Handbuch*: Zurich: diaphanes 2015. For some recent participatory tendencies, cf. Corina Caduff, "Artistic Research: Methods – Development of a

Considering the international success story of artistic research throughout the various artistic disciplines, it appears somewhat striking that the discipline of literature has so far not participated in the discourse. The reasons for this seem to be primarily of an institutional nature. While creative writing programmes are available as a type of professional literary training analogous to studies in photography, film, painting, music, theatre, etc., such programmes are usually embedded within the humanities; in the United States of America and Great Britain, traditionally within English departments.⁴ Only in exceptional cases—and during the last decade—have creative writing programmes been established at art academies, art universities, and art schools.⁵ Therefore, creative writing programmes are seldom related to other forms of arts education. And this explains why discussions about artistic research, still generally taking place at art schools, rarely include literature.

Writers and Scholars In-Between

Although literature as a discipline is not represented in the artistic research discourse, numerous individual writers and scholars have ties to a variety of institutional constellations in which overlaps between literature, art, and research become manifest:

- Writers who teach their literary practice in new institutional contexts. In addition to the new creative writing programmes at art schools, a few recently set up programmes also foster specifically conceptual and transdisciplinary modes of ‘art writing’ at universities.
- Writers who are increasingly employed by art schools to teach thesis writing classes. As a result of the establishment of artistic research and especially in view of PhD programmes, thesis writing is gaining importance already at MA level.
- Transdisciplinary writers who are active in several fields of the arts, and who are also teaching their particular crossover practices to younger colleagues.

Discourse – Current Risks,” in: Kirsten Merete Langkilde, ed., *Poetry of the Real*. Basel: FHNW 2017, pp. 311–323.

4 On the rise of creative writing programmes in anglophone countries, cf. Paul Dawson, *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*. London, New York, NY: Routledge, 2004; Mark McGurl, *The Program Era. Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

5 Such as the BA in Literary Writing at the University of the Arts, Bern (since 2006); the BA Language Arts at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna (since 2009/2010); and the MFA Literary Composition at the Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg (since 2014).

- Literary scholars who teach creative writing or ‘theory’ classes at art schools.
- Art historians and cultural historians who inquire and observe the emergence and development of artistic research as a discipline.

This volume comprises the work of 16 such writers and scholars who are institutionally located in nine Western European countries. They expand on their methodological approaches as well as their practice, and they analyse exemplary case studies. Presenting their points of view next to one another might allow the delineation—albeit provisionally—of the meandering boundaries of a future field of practice-based ‘literary research.’ This will quite likely not be a homogenous field, but one constituted by a variety of activities and institutional allocations. Nevertheless, the different areas are interconnected and do participate in a common discourse. In this sense, the volume aims to compile an inventory of prevalent observations, overarching questions, and shared challenges. A number of these concern the status, form, and function of a written thesis in practice-based research. Others derive from debates about various kinds of knowledge that such research might bring about.

Literary Self-Reflection

As mentioned before, the current exclusion of literature from debates on artistic research is primarily due to the embedding of creative writing programmes in the humanities, in the field of monolingual cultural and literary studies. Nevertheless, some of these programs inevitably raise questions about the conditions and requirements for practice-based research in literature, since they offer ‘third circle’ studies leading to a PhD degree. The starting point for this debate is the stipulation, common in the other arts, that an accompanying, explanatory or reflective text should be added to the artistic research work—even though the proportion of such additional texts varies greatly between different countries and curricula.⁶ As a consequence, there is a tendency in the

6 Early debates on artistic research revealed considerable disagreement over the necessity and role of an explanatory text. For opposing positions, cf., for example, Christoph Schenker, “Kunst als Forschung,” in: Peter Emch et al., eds., *Kunstklasse: Studiengang Bildende Kunst, Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst Zürich: Inserts, Texte, Statements*, Zurich: Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst, 1998, pp. 21–29; here p. 28; and Hannula et al. (2005), *Artistic Research*, p. 165. In December 2016, the ELIA ‘Florence Principles in the Arts’ were published: http://www.elia-artschools.org/userfiles/File/customfiles/1-the-florence-principles20161124105336_20161202112511.pdf. According to these principles, a “discursive component” alongside the artwork is required: “The project consists of original work(s) of art and contains a *discursive* component that critically reflects upon the project and documents the research

field of creative writing to demand two texts for an artistic PhD: in addition to the literary work, a supplementary, explanatory text in which the writer methodologically reflects and contextualises their working and writing.

In the history of literature, such explanatory treatises have long formed the genre of poetology. It includes reflections on literature and language by writers, who—often in pieces that supplement their creative texts—deal with the philosophical premises, historical reference points and linguistic procedures of their work. It is the detachment from the actual artwork or the autonomisation of the poetological component respectively which institutionally constitutes artistic research today, and which, of course, leads to further questions: Can such a detachment be both mandatory and theoretically justified in the field of creative writing, or is it rather an obstructive antinomy (Jan Baetens, University of Leuven)? And how precisely can an institutional requirement become productive in the context of creative writing PhD programmes at art schools (Fredrik Nyberg, Valand Academy, Gothenburg)? In other research contexts at art schools, too, writers find themselves motivated to explore the possibilities of separate, poetological text experiments (Maya Rasker, University of the Arts, Utrecht).

Writing in Art and Artistic Research

Because artistic research in general often requires a supplementary text component for reflection and contextualisation, artists from all disciplines increasingly see themselves obliged to write. In a variety of practices, they employ language as a medium of reflection, as a mediator of the artwork, as a component of transdisciplinary practices, etc. However, such 'artistic' practices of writing are not an entirely new phenomenon. Through the avant-garde movements and since, language has, in the course of the 20th century, been integrated into other artistic forms in diverse ways. While at first serving as an artistic medium of expression alongside others, for example in text and image collages or in the formulation of artistic programmes and manifestos, in the second half of the 20th century the writing of texts in the context of conceptual art advanced to become a valid artistic mode of its own.

In hindsight, this historical development can be viewed as a prerequisite for the emergence of artistic research. Particularly in the aftermath of Marcel Duchamp's and the various permutations of conceptual art, artists were

process." (p. 7), date of access: 17 Sept. 2018 [emphasis added by us]. The term "discursive" eventually leaves it open to being an oral or written component.

able to enter universities and starting to undertake ‘research,’ which sometimes granted them a degree of financial security they hadn’t previously had access to (Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, University of Amsterdam). Meanwhile, the inclusion of texts in the artistic practice of feminist artists of the 1960s and 70s served to assert a new, by then female-attributed skill, and brought about early forms of documentary-researching procedures (Redell Olsen, Royal Holloway, University of London). In all cases, the new artistic text productions expanded the established literary genres— such as prose, drama, and poetry—and they brought about productive interactions between the disciplines. Recently, an even stronger and more diverse proliferation of conceptual writing has been developing across all artistic disciplines (Maria Fusco, Northumbria University). In the narrower area of the politically and institutionally defined artistic research, meanwhile, the question has arisen as to which forms and procedures are suitable for a complementary, reflective text. Should artists who write a PhD or an MFA thesis adhere to the standards of, for example, academic, theoretical, or critical texts? Or shouldn’t they rather develop their own, idiosyncratic writing methods in order to textually express the specifics of their respective work (Daniela Cascella, University of the Arts, London)? A revealing example of this is the challenge of making the speechlessness of a visual work perceptible without subjecting it to an analytical language of interpretation (Salomé Voegelin, University of the Arts, London).

The Knowledge of Literature

Current reflections on the production of knowledge in practice-based art research follow the debates about *tacit* and *embodied knowledge*, as mentioned earlier, and they explore epistemological considerations regarding the peculiar kinds of knowledge accessible to the arts—in contrast to the sciences, for example.⁷ Such discussions may also be instructive for literary research since one can equally ask what kinds of knowledge are produced and passed on in a work of literature. For example, in the last fifteen years the knowledge gained from literary metaphors, procedures, or narratives has been examined from a

⁷ The discussions on “Artistic Knowledge, Part 1” and “Artistic Knowledge, Part 2” in: James Elkins, ed., *What Do Artists Know?* University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, pp. 39–45 and pp. 47–57, provide examples for the ongoing debates about epistemological categories and various kinds of *tacit knowledge*, respectively. From a philosophical vantage point, Dieter Mersch, *Epistemologies of Aesthetics*, translated by Laura Radosh. Zurich: diaphanes, 2015 [2015] develops criteria for distinguishing artistic forms of knowledge from scientific ones.

scholarly perspective, and literary references to other disciplines of knowledge have been revealed.⁸ Along these lines, practice-based literary research, too, might examine the knowledge contained in various forms of speech and writing, or it might experiment with including material from archives, encyclopaedias, and scientific research in the fictional text. In any case, in the interest of artistic research, it is important to ensure that the research questions are recognisable and comprehensible and that a knowledge gain is clearly identifiable.

In various contemporary writing practices the examination of linguistic phenomena from everyday language is pursued as a fruitful strategy for the production of new knowledge. For example, political and military language rules can be analysed in terms of their functions and modes of action by making use of literary and documentary methods (Vincent Broqua, University Paris 8). When everyday language rules exert formative societal influence, their literary examination may lead to a critical analysis of social norms (Ferdinand Schmatz, University of Applied Arts, Vienna). And as the linguistic representation of the world is hardly to be separated from seeing and knowing the world, new linguistic procedures often create new views of the world (Alexander Damianisch, University of Applied Arts, Vienna). In a Wittgensteinian perspective, finally, literary research might explore different ‘aspects’ of everyday words, metaphors or linguistic imagery, thereby highlighting various functions of language that remain unexplored in everyday use (Tine Melzer, Bern University of the Arts).

Models and Precursors

While the essays in the previous chapter present contemporary conceptions of literary knowledge production, the question can also be approached from the rather scholarly vantage point of cultural history. Historical instances of literary knowledge production that were consciously and strategically developed as artistic experiments—sometimes in exchange or in coincidence with innovations in the humanities or the natural sciences—might be instructive for understanding certain strategies of ‘artistic research’ *avant la lettre*. Again, such methodological considerations of identifying historical precursors or models are also common in the more general discourse on

8 Cf. Sigrid Weigel/Bernhard Dotzler, eds., „*fille der combination*“. *Literaturforschung und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 2005; Michael Wood, *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; John Gibson, “Literature and Knowledge,” in: Richard Eldridge, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 467–485; Roland Borgards et al., eds., *Literatur und Wissen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2013.

artistic research,⁹ and again they can be re-considered for the field of literature. Without providing an overview or a representative selection, the last four contributions to this volume examine exemplary cases from the second half of the 20th century.

Chris Kraus's novel *I Love Dick* (1997)—blending autobiography, French Theory and art criticism with performative and experimental elements as well as older forms such as the epistolary novel and the diary—has become an influential role model for contemporary transdisciplinary forms of writing. In her own kind of 'research' practice, Kraus thoroughly re-considered the form of the novel as well as the precarious position of the female intellectual at the end of the 20th century (Anneleen Masschelein, University of Leuven). At around the same time, Oskar Pastior worked on his 'organised' translations of Charles Baudelaire. Exploring various ways of staying true to the sounds and rhythms of poems, while mostly ignoring semantics, he examined the conflicted relations between original and translation, speech and writing, French and German (Thomas Strässle, University of the Arts, Bern). In the late 1970s, Roland Barthes developed new writerly forms situated in between essay and novel, critique and narration, which resulted from and reiterated some of his scientific findings about the role of the author, various kinds of artistic languages, semiology, etc. (Kathrin Busch, Berlin University of the Arts). Another twenty years earlier, Vienna poet Konrad Bayer combined linguistic methodologies of his time with inquiries into the lasting imprint of National Socialism in German language (Tan Wälchli, Zurich University of the Arts). Taken together, these scattered examples indicate that literary 'research' strategies *avant la lettre* resulted from very different incentives—biographical, cultural, political, etc.—and aimed to produce new knowledge about various aspects of language and literary forms as well as their historical contexts and conditions.

Multi- and Monolingualism

Not least the examples from the final chapter might also serve as reminders that literary practices are inextricably bound to national languages: English, French, German, etc. This equally applies to contemporary creative writing

9 A prime example from the visual arts are the painterly innovations by Paul Cézanne. Since Merlau-Ponty's influential treatises—*Le doute de Cézanne* (1945) and, in particular, *L'oeil et l'esprit* (1960)—Cézanne's new ways of painting have often been regarded as coinciding or competing with innovations in the scientific understanding of vision and perception, and therefore as an example of artistic research *avant la lettre* (cf., for example, Michael Cobussen, "The Intruder," in: Corina Caduff et al., eds., *Art and Artistic Research*. Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010, pp. 46–54; here pp. 48–49).

training including related methodological discussions. Since each language produces its own specific poetic aspects, their discussion and treatment require the same language and are not easily transferable to any other. For this reason alone, an international discourse on 'literary research' will hardly ever be homogeneous. While the international debate about artistic research in general, which can be considered as a metadiscourse, is usually conducted in English, any future field of practice-based literary research will always be characterised by differences grounded in multilingualism that demand recognition.

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Literary Self-Reflection



Writing Cannot Tell Everything

Jan Baetens

Abstract:

This chapter addresses the topic of the *mixte* (English: the *mixt*), a type of writing that combines very different, sometimes perhaps even incompatible types of writing, such as fiction and non-fiction or, in a more singular manner, fiction and writing on fiction (the term of *mixt* has been coined by author and theoretician Jean Ricardou). However, the present chapter does not just present or examine Ricardou's theory and practice of the *mixt* but takes it as its starting point to reflect on the status of the author's self-commentary in a research-oriented fictional practice. More precisely, the chapter makes a plea, not for the merger but the articulation (and thus the relative separation) of fiction and writing on fiction in practice-based artistic research.

Limits and Pitfalls of Creative Writing as Practice-Based Research

As clearly argued by Corina Caduff, the theory and practice of artistic research remain underdeveloped in the field of literature. The opening claim of her 2009 contribution to the debate still holds today:

In its beginnings in the 1990s the artistic research discourse centered mainly on the visual arts from which it arose. In recent years, however, an increasing number of relevant studies have appeared from the fields of design, theater, and film—joined increasingly by music and dance—in the context of artistic research. . . . In what follows, a field will be discussed that, to the best of my knowledge, has yet to be raised in the debates about artistic research: literature.¹

The following pages should be read as a brief comment on this observation from the geographic and cultural perspective of France, where contrary to most of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries discussed by Caduff there is hardly any tradition of PhD programmes in creative writing. Things are changing, true, but slowly, and the aim of my remark is of course not to suggest

1 Corina Caduff, "Literature and Artistic Research," in: Corina Caduff et al., eds., *Art and Artistic Research*. Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2009, pp. 98–105; here p. 98.

that there is no tradition of artistic practice in literature in France. What I would like to make clear in this contribution is the importance and originality of a particular French theoretical and practical intervention in the debates on literary creativity, which concerns the need to shift from the traditional idea of the author as a genius to the modern, explicitly democratic idea of the author as crafts(wo)man and producer. This is related to less academic forms of theorising practice, another key dimension of French literary life, where ideas on literature and how to write have always been less determined by academic gatekeepers than by the authors themselves, who like to elaborate their personal claims and convictions in treatises.²

In more general terms, the tradition of practice-based research can be said to be both well established and poorly recognised in the literary field. On the one hand, literary writing has, for a long time, often been practised as an experiment relying on a wide set of models, hypotheses, and techniques. This is what many authors do intuitively, as demonstrated for instance by Gustave Flaubert, whose letters contain countless reflections on the art of writing,³ or Henry James's prefaces to the edition of his complete novels eventually republished under the title *The Art of the Novel*.⁴ In quite some cases, authors even work with an explicit programme, which they either illustrate or put to the test when starting to write. Edgar Allan Poe's *Philosophy of Composition*,⁵ Raymond Roussel's *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*,⁶ Oulipo's use of literary 'constraints' or preformatted rules that steer and foster the literary imagination,⁷ these are all examples of the many ways in which authors foreground the mutual involvement of theory and practice. On the other hand, there is also a strong resistance to link theory and practice. The current difficulties with understanding or reshaping creative writing as a form of artistic research—that is of the rational and methodologically enhanced production of new insights and new knowledge—is a symptom of this resistance. This is why creative writing, as it

2 A famous case for this was Sartre's *What is Literature?*. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (1948), translated by Bernard Frechtman. London: Methuen, 1950.

3 Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1857–1880* (1887–1893), translated and ed. by Francis Steegmuller. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1984.

4 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (1909). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

5 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), in: *The Complete Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe*. New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1996, pp. 503–512.

6 Raymond Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* (1935), translated by Trevor Winkfield. Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2005.

7 Warren F. Motte, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*. McLean, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1986.

is generally practised and theorised today either inside or outside academia,⁸ isn't necessarily the best answer to the ongoing developments of practice-based research and PhD programmes, as will become clear in the remainder of this chapter.

Is creative writing in itself a form of practice-based research? In theory, the answer should be *yes*, provided this type of writing does what research is supposed to do, namely establishing a productive interaction with a given theory, selecting an adequate method, defining one or more research questions and, last but not least, producing a set of falsifiable answers to these questions while equally giving a meaningful feedback on method as well as theory. Nevertheless, in practice, most existing creative writing programmes do not comply with such an approach to research. To pursue it, they have to be changed radically. On the one hand, it will prove necessary to dismantle the separation of creative writing and (literary, critical, and cultural) theory, which belong to completely different curricula with different staff and different students addressing completely different questions. In other words, what has to change is the very *input* of the creative writing programmes: the individual project of the student is no longer sufficient; he or she will also have to address more general and therefore more theoretical issues. On the other hand, it will be no less imperative to also enlarge the programmes' *output*: instead of only delivering a work of fiction (or creative non-fiction), the student of the creative writing programme will have to complement this production with a second text, a theoretical and methodological supplement in which he or she reflects upon both the process and the result of the creative work. This is what generally happens when creative writing programmes plan to enlarge their course offerings in order to include practice-based PhDs. To quote just one but very representative example:

The PhD in Creative Writing provides the capstone to the postgraduate Creative Writing programme at Edinburgh, offering students graduating from the MSc in Creative Writing an opportunity to undertake work at a higher level, aimed towards the production of a substantial, publishable piece of creative writing, accompanied by a sustained exercise in critical study.⁹

8 Anglo-Saxon creative writing programmes are mostly located within academia, while the continental tradition of *ateliers d'écriture* or literary workshops doesn't necessarily rely on academia. Cf. Mark McGurl, *The Program Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

9 <http://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/english-literature/postgraduate/phd/creative-writing>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

The changes in *input*, which are mainly institutional, are easier to handle than those in *output*, which concern the very heart of practice-based research in literary writing. Even if the gap between theory and creative writing is very deep, the design of a new, mixed curriculum is certainly not impossible. The simultaneous articulation of creative writing and critical study, however, raises very different questions, given the radical difference in nature between both types of writing. The combination of creative writing and critical study is a challenging, risky task, and can even prove harmful in more than one regard.

Firstly, one might ask whether it is possible to catch the specificity of literary writing in a supplementary text that is not itself literary, but didactic, informing, instructive, etc. Even if one rejects the outdated romantic idea that a literary text can only be experienced and not explained, the fundamental question remains whether it is possible to provide such an explanation in a non-literary text. Should the critical supplement rather be a piece of writing itself? Examples for this kind of problem might be, for instance, the poetics of allusions or irony, for as soon as one makes explicit the mechanism of allusion or the functioning of irony, one also destroys their effect. And yet this issue might not be equally grave in all kinds of texts. For instance, in texts that Roland Barthes, in 1970, called *lisible* texts—which do not specifically challenge the reader's habits and expectations—the unpacking of allusions or of irony is less problematic than in what Barthes called *scriptible* texts: in the former, the disclosing of the hidden reference is welcomed as a useful help to the reader, in the latter, the same intervention may destroy the reader's creative struggle with the writing.¹⁰

Secondly, and provided one succeeds in turning the critical supplement into a real literary text, one may ask whether such a transformation does not jeopardise the 'scientific' character of the commentary, which must be transparent to all and open to intersubjective debate and remediation. Will the literary version of critical commentary be able to provide new objective knowledge, or will its gain in knowledge depend on mere intuition and subjective interpretation, both on the part of the author-researcher and the reader? To discuss this problem it might be helpful to remember Ricardou's distinction between *lecturable* and *lisible* texts, presented some ten years after Barthes's discussion

10 Barthes's terms are usually translated as *readerly* and *writerly* texts, although a more literal translation would be 'readable' and 'writable.' While the former term refers to rather conventional texts that do not confront the read with any challenges, the latter means a kind of textual practice that challenges the readers, while also giving them a special kind of pleasure and bliss. Cf. Roland Barthes, *S/Z. An Essay* (1970), translated by Richard Miller. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974 and *The Pleasure of the Text* (1972), translated by Richard Miller. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975.

of the *lisible/scriptible* distinction. For Ricardou, *lecturable* refers to what can be clearly understood in a text (*lecturable* is a neologism one could translate as ‘technically understandable’), while the latter term, *lisible*, refers to what pleases the reader (*lisible* is a very general term which takes here the special meaning of ‘pleasant to read’).¹¹

According to Ricardou, any text can always be framed through the double lens of the *lecturable* and the *lisible*—since all texts teach us something we like or dislike in some way—and this necessary intertwinement can explain why any straightforward transformation of the critical analysis into a second piece of creative writing is dangerous: while creative writing cannot but emphasise the importance of the *lisible*, critical analysis has to foreground the role of the *lecturable*. Another difficulty is that the implicit sequential arrangement of both parts—first comes the writing, then comes the analysis—does not always reflect the actual process, which can include many feedback loops. The analysis can precede the writing or interrupt and change it, for example, which complicates the very distinction between both text types.

The Articulation of Writing and Criticism: Towards a Writing of the *mixt*

Given the various difficulties one encounters when one supplements the literary text with a didactic, informative supplement *and* when one tries to present this critical supplement in a literary form, it is understandable that advocates of practice-based research have tried to radically merge both aspects in one single text. Either they make the analysis part of the writing or they set out

11 Cf. Jean Ricardou, “Éléments de textique (I),” in: *conséquences* 10 (1987), pp. 5–28: here p. 17. At first sight, one may have the impression that the tandem *lecturable/lisible* is a reformulation of Barthes’s *lisible/scriptible* distinction, but the differences are more significant than the similarities. In Barthes, the competing terms designate two different text types (a text, or a fragment of a text, is either *lisible* or *scriptible*), whereas the Ricardolian terms describe a more dialectic relationship, according to which each text can be read as both *lecturable* and *lisible*. Moreover, the relationship between both reader reactions is anything except direct and linear. One might think, for instance, that very *lecturable* texts are also very *lisible* (for we tend to like more what we understand) or, the other way round, that very *lisible* texts are also *lecturable* (for we read better when we like what we read). In practice, this is not always the case: On the one hand, certain readers are emotionally triggered by cognitive thresholds, so that a problem in *lecturabilité* can prove a springboard for *lisibilité*. On the other hand, texts that are *lisible* do not always engender good critical readings (this is perhaps what we say by stating that reading for fun and reading for criticism are seen as mutually incompatible).

from the analysis but tend to transform it into the writing practice itself. The second traditionally happens in the various forms of the *ars poetica* genre, where text and programme, creative output and theoretical input, aim at coinciding as seamlessly as possible. But there are many other ways in which a creative text can be given a self-revelatory twist. A good point in case is the countless occurrences of the *mise en abyme*—a technique that establishes a mirror effect between part and whole of the text—thus making a certain detail reveal one or more aspects of the complete text like the play within the play in *Hamlet*.¹² In modernist texts, this internal didacticism can tend to complete self-referentiality. In that case, the work is composed in such a way that all its elements mirror its own structure. This happens in certain types of conceptual poetry (we all know examples of poems stating that ‘this text is made of seven words’, for instance) as well as in avant-garde novels. (The French New Novel, in particular, has often been analysed in this perspective.)

One of the most detailed and sophisticated examples of such a take on writing has been proposed by Ricardou, who published a piece of writing, *La Prise de Constantinople* (1965), which aspired at complete self-referentiality.¹³ More than a dozen years later, he complemented his novel with a very long critical analysis in which he made explicit the implicitly designated rules of the production, structure, and functioning of the work.¹⁴ This *a posteriori* critical analysis obviously betrays the failure of the initial programme. If it is necessary to add such a long commentary, this implies that the original text did not reach its own objective to self-reflexively render its composition transparent. In other words: If it was actually possible to read in Ricardou’s novel what it claims to display and demonstrate, namely the mechanisms of its own genesis and composition, then the subsequent production of a critical analysis could only be seen as an attempt to remediate the novel’s flaws.

Similar problems occur when the blurring of the boundaries between creative writing and critical analysis is not pursued at the level of the piece of writing, as in the case of *La Prise de Constantinople*, but sets out from the theoretical analysis itself. The desire to conceive one’s own critical and theoretical discourse as a form of (creative) writing is certainly not new, as demonstrated by the stylistic ambitions—and qualities!—of many critics. Yet it has become one of the fundamental characteristics of French poststructuralist critical

12 Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text* (1975), translated by Jeremy Whitely. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.

13 Jean Ricardou, *La Prise de Constantinople* (1965), in: *L’intégrale Jean Ricardou. Tome 2: La Prise de Constantinople et autres écrits. 1962–1966*. Brussels: Les Impressions Nouvelles 2018, pp. 139–351.

14 Jean Ricardou, “La Fiction à mesure,” in: *Nouveaux Problèmes du roman*. Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1978, pp. 244–351.

writing, such as most famously represented by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, among others.¹⁵ In such texts, one can often observe that a multiplication of glosses, paraphrases, commentaries, exegeses, and other continuations hint at the difficulty of striking the right balance between writing and analysis. This can appear as if the tendency to always add supplementary details and further sophistications were the symptoms of the tragic awareness that no text or formula will ever be capable of really fixing or pinpointing the unlimited possibilities of a text.

In all cases discussed so far, be it the radical separation of writing and analysis (as in most current example of creative writing PhD programmes) or the no less radical attempts at merging both text types into one (as in the experimental praxis of certain avant-garde writers and critics, sometimes imitated in creative writing programmes), we have encountered a fundamental and recurring problem: one always explains either too much or not enough. However, it is feasible to think of a third strategy of linking creative writing and critical analysis, which avoids some of the issues of either separation or blending. This strategy maintains the tension and difference between the two types of writing, but it does so *within one text itself*. In other words: It neither creates a diptych out of a piece of creative writing and a sample of critical analysis *nor* tries to invent new ways of writing that merge the two text types and erase or cover up their essential differences. Such a procedure can be based on the *montage* of different text types—in this case creative writing and critical analysis. But other kinds of *montage* are relevant as well, between poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction, high and low, narrative and argumentative, specialised and vulgarising, schematic and detailed, etc.

Montage is, of course, a multifaceted notion, and it should be clear that the type of montage in question is not that of the Hollywood *continuity editing*, which tries to leave montage 'invisible' in order to naturalise and thus make imperceptible the technical devices of storytelling. Instead, a point of reference might be Sergei Eisenstein's *intellectual montage*, where the meaning-making effects are derived from the visible clash between heterogeneous elements. In literature, a good example of such montage is the concept of the *mixt*, which Ricardou presented four years after his aforementioned critical piece about the self-reflexive novel. This new text is called *Le Théâtre des métamorphoses* (1982), and—logically!—it both *critically* comments and *practically* applies the new notion of the *mixt* in a wide range of forms.¹⁶ The new notion, as well

15 Serge Doubrovsky, *The New Criticism in France* (1966), translated by Derek Coltman. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.

16 Jean Ricardou, *Le Théâtre des métamorphoses*. Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1982.

as the procedure, can be seen as direct consequences of Ricardou's failed attempts to, first, elaborate a totally self-referential fiction and, second, complement this fiction with the help of an autonomous critical essay.

A key feature of the *mixt* is to be found in Ricardou's accompanying definition of the 'text,' once again a general term redefined in a completely idiosyncratic manner. For Ricardou's, the word 'text' does not simply refer to any kind of written utterance but designates a very singular subsection of these utterances. If all writings have, at least in principle, a referential function (they refer to something that is outside the words), some writings have also a function that is self-referential (they refer to one or more aspects of their own structure). Verbal compositions whose function is referential or *representative* are occurrences of what Ricardou calls 'writing,' while verbal compositions whose function is self-referential or *meta-representative* are occurrences of 'text.' The *mixt* is then not only the montage of different forms and styles of discourse, it is more fundamentally the strategy that relies on the combination of these forms to explore the tension between 'writing' and 'text,' or if one prefers between representation and meta-representation.¹⁷

The *Mixt* as a Model for Practice-Based Research

The tension between 'writing' and 'text,' I would like to argue, is the most basic problem that should be addressed in debates on creative writing as a form of practice-based research. If creative writing and critical analysis stay apart, something will be lost on both sides. The 'writing' of the critical analysis will never be able to tackle all the 'textual' dimensions of the creative piece, while at the same time the split between both may suggest that the critical essay accompanying the creative part of the diptych does not have to take into account its own 'textual' structures and dimensions. If both parts are merged, the problems may be even worse, since it may lead to a neglect of the challenging yet problematic relationship of *lisible* and *lecturable*. A solution to these problems is provided by the *mixt*, which is not only a kind of collage but also a form of negative dialectics. In the *mixt*, the two forces, which cannot be superseded in a synthetic reconciliation, appear in opposition to and next to each other. In such a way, the *mixt* does not abolish the differences between creative writing and critical analysis, but neither does it exclude the possibility of their mutual enrichment. In Ricardou's terms, 'writing' does not have to be confused with

¹⁷ Jean Ricardou, "How to Reduce Fallacious Representative Innocence. Word by Word Interview with Michel Sirvent," in: *Studies in 20th-Century Literature* 15:2 (1991), pp. 277–298.

‘text,’ but to include some of its forms and functions. Accordingly, one would have to transform the creative writing part in such a way that it can include some aspects of its analytical counterpart, not in order to diminish its ‘textuality,’ but in order to enrich it with its dialectical other. And, of course, the same would apply to the critical analysis part so that the practice-based PhD would then be one work having two separate parts, which each include elements of the opposite pole. In this way, the stereotypical distinction between the ‘infinite profundity’ of the creative dimension and the ‘inevitable simplification’ of the analytical dimension might be overcome.

Besides this fundamental rethinking of the necessary entanglement of creative writing and critical analysis, the *mixt* has at least two other advantages. Firstly, it is an approach that can be applied to the work itself as to its different paratexts—namely the network of verbal and visual elements that ‘surrounds’ the work¹⁸—such as for instance the title, the blurb, the colophon, etc. This is a crucial move in the deconstruction of conventional barriers between writing spaces. Generally speaking, a paratext is not supposed to be structured by the same literary mechanisms as the text itself. (In many cases, as we know it, the paratext is not written by the author herself, but by the publisher, who is the legal owner of the paratext, contrary to the text whose intellectual ownership exclusively belongs to the author.) But it seems logical to expand the deconstruction of the textual difference between creative writing and critical thinking to the editorial difference between text and paratext, which should not be kept apart from the work on the text itself.

Secondly, the *mixt* also escapes the traditional division of reading and writing. The tension between *lisible* and *lecturable* or ‘writing’ and ‘text’—all these terms are used here in the sense coined by Ricardou—do not exclusively characterise the work of either the reader or the writer. Both are constantly facing similar questions to the point that the very difference between reading and writing becomes as infinitely dialectic as any of the other distinctions discussed above. In the *mixt*, the difference between reading and writing does not fade out, on the contrary. Reading and writing become alternate moments of a more general approach of text processing, each moment of reading translating into a new moment of writing and vice versa. For all these reasons, the *mixt* is a good concept for further discussions on the shift from the classic creative writing programme to new forms of practice-based research in literature.

18 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987), translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

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The Writing and the Doing—about Artistic Research through a Writing Practice

Fredrik Nyberg

Abstract

The article discusses the emergence of artistic research within the discipline Literary Composition at the University of Gothenburg. The text assumes a critical vantage point in its reflections upon the specific circumstances generated by the artistic text and its metacritical dimensions. These dimensions, inherent to the literary composition, are illustrated by two concrete poetic examples which are contextualised by two historical sections. The first engages in a more general discussion, while the second is comprised of a reading of the three dissertations currently available within Literary Composition at the University of Gothenburg. On the whole, the article localises a research method and praxis which increasingly takes place *through* rather than *about* literary composition.

Introduction

The Swedish philosopher Jonna Hjerström Lappalainen writes, “When we are to reflect on our practice we turn to theory. What then happens is that we are caught in the gaze of theory, theory’s distinctions and theory’s limitations. We see practice as a voiceless feminine phenomenon to be seduced or conquered by theory.”¹ The following text is conceived to address various attempts that, together, strive to arrive at a form of representation which can disrupt and bring to an end this in many ways problematic conquest. Perhaps a series of exchanges between practice (also regarded as a thinking) and theory (also seen as a doing) can then instead arise. A situation where one no longer knows who conquers whom. Or, perhaps even better, a comparable situation wherein metaphors of militarism can be retired.

Does the luminosity of language cast everyone in the same light?

1 Jonna Hjerström Lappalainen, “Att reflektera över det som ännu inte sagts,” in: Magnus William-Olsson, ed., *Methodos. Konstens kunskap, kunskapens konst*. Stockholm: Ariel litterär kritik, 2014, pp. 65–84: here p. 69.

Artistic Research within the Discipline Literary Composition

The goal of this text is not to write a history of Literary Composition as a discipline. The discipline exists, and, since 2008, there is also research being conducted within this area. It is this research the text addresses.

Artistic Research was instituted at the University of Gothenburg around the turn of the millennium without the participation of Literary Composition. That Literary Composition did not immediately get on board ‘the research train’ stemmed from serious doubts concerning what this new discipline could create and house. This initial hesitation within Literary Composition should not be regarded as a simple repudiation of a new practice, as yet another expression of the intellectual historian Sven Eric Liedman’s statement, “There will always be those that slam on the brakes and say—this is wrong.”² Not to say yes right away is not the same as saying no. The wheels continued to turn. The door remained open, and this fact was of great importance to the evolution of the alternative (non-)colonisation, which I shall now consider. Liedman states that processes whereby new scientific disciplines are incorporated and accepted as a new component of the ever-larger scientific body historically appear to repeat themselves. He is of the opinion that new scientific disciplines encounter initial and repeated resistance before they are incorporated into the ‘academic circle.’ I want to assert that Literary Composition did not assume an utterly customary position in this recurring process. The train continued to roll and what became important was instead that the relevant questions were posed, that the right bodies embarked at the right station and at the right time.

Do I always have to write about another world to think about my own world?

In the introduction to her dissertation *När Andra skriver* (*The Writing of Others*), the author and poet Mara Lee asserts, “Within artistic research there are thus far quite few methods which can be considered generally valid and divisible.”³ This truth is perhaps even more relevant if one considers the scholarship produced until now by Literary Composition as a discipline or concentration.

The following may still become an attempt to say something general about a thus far fortunately non-general methodology. A double- or triple-methodology that produced three dissertations by the spring of 2017, which to an exceptional

2 Sven-Eric Liedman, “‘There will always be those that slam on the brakes and say this is wrong . . .’ – On Education and Research in the Humanities and Art,” in: *ArtMonitor* 6 (2009), pp. 149–155; here p. 155.

3 Mara Lee, *När Andra skriver. Skrivande som motstånd, ansvar och tid*. Göteborg: Glänta produktion, 2014, p. 26.

degree are visionary rather than totalising.⁴ Before me, I see a form of conquest that does not conquer something that in itself is silent or silencing, but rather something which speaks and also continues to speak about its subject even after the theoretical-scientific gaze is done glaring. At the same time—on happy occasions—new peals and tones are added to this established speech.

Does the choir always tell the truth?

In the conversation about research within Literary Composition, a possibly underutilised space between education and research has been discussed. Repeatedly, desire was voiced to place the research perhaps surprisingly close to the experience-based conversation and practice long since established as a more or less unspoken pedagogical axiom within Literary Composition. I imagine that a fictional or poetic writing is marked by a simultaneity of feeling and thinking and that this state with perhaps somewhat different emphases is highly relevant also to artistic research. One can speak of ‘experience’ as another word for ‘theory.’ And of ‘theory’ as an ongoing writing practice. Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback contends in an essay that *in* similar “reflective presentations”⁵ an “abandonment of aesthetic positions in favor of a self that surrenders to poetic situations” takes place. Situations which, I further imagine, are highly determined by fluctuations and shifts in established seeing.

To look straight into the fire.

Literature and Its Metacritical Gestures

In the text “Författaren som forskare” (“The Author as Researcher”), the scholar and writer Oscar Hemer writes, “there has never been a lack of self-reflective literature.”⁶ It is often amusing to assert, for example, that the poem knows more about itself than its author does. And I imagine that the amusing, or attractive, in this statement arises from its partial truth. With the emergence of Literary Composition within artistic research, it becomes possible to ‘study’ or

4 This text is strictly interested in research conducted within the discipline Literary Composition at the University of Gothenburg. Other artistic research projects concerning literature have been produced in other contexts and within other disciplines; these will not be discussed in this particular text.

5 Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, “Paramgolé – vaghetens poetik,” translated by Andreas Gedin and Johan Öberg, in: *ArtMonitor* 10 (2013), pp. 129–137; here p. 136.

6 Oscar Hemer, “Författaren som forskare – tautologi eller självmotsägelse?,” in: *Forskning och kritik – granskning och recension av konstnärlig forskning*. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet Årsbok KfoU, 2010, pp. 101–108; here p. 102.

consider a situation wherein a linguistic assertion—which in itself contains a more or less manifest metacritical dimension—mingles with yet another meta level. It is then expected (at least in some cases) to originate with the same authorial participation that produced the initial dimension and also (of course) the ‘source text’ itself. That construction warrants close consideration. It creates a specific situation that should reasonably affect the emergence of scientific discourse.

I rhyme in order to know what I do not already know.

So what is meant by this inherently textual reflexive dimension which arguably should be relevant to the space where artistic research about and around artistic writing operates? The question is too broad to grapple with, and for that reason it is, I imagine, better to become concrete by very briefly discussing a set of different but linked examples.

There is a poem by the Swedish poet and literary scholar Gunnar D. Hansson titled “Långröse” (“Long Cairn Grave”) that can be found in the book *Förlusten av Norge (The Loss of Norway)*. A “long cairn grave” is a pre-historical grave consisting of rocks gathered in a formation whose length is at least twice its width. In the poem’s two mottos we learn more about the nature of a “long cairn grave.” In the first one, G. A. Gustafson writes, “Most are now disturbed so that they make a bumpy, low ridge, with somewhat irregular sides and ends.”⁷ Hansson’s poem does not become more explicit about the nature of “long cairn graves,” nor can the term itself be found anywhere but in the poem’s title. However, the poem visually (and studiously) describes a “long cairn grave.” The short, centred lines sketch out an iconic image: a long and narrow, approximately four pages long, reflective surface with “irregular sides,” where the title and influences which arise in my reading can be amplified, broken against each other and thereby deepened. “Långröse” is a poem about death. And about “long-term successes.” It mentions “the final point” and “night of death.”⁸ Before the poem was published in *Förlusten av Norge*, it could be read in the publication *Ord & Bild* in 1998. When the poem was written, Gunnar D. Hansson, born 1945, was most likely around fifty years old. Early in the poem, I read, “Fröding⁹ became / fifty-one (almost). / Shakespeare became fifty-one (slightly more than).”¹⁰ The list soon grows longer when Honoré de Balzac, Rainer Maria Rilke and Marcel Proust join the group of those who died around the age of fifty-one. In “Långröse”

7 Gunnar D. Hansson, *Förlusten av Norge*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2000, p. 165.

8 Hansson (2000), *Förlusten av Norge*, pp. 167–168.

9 Gustaf Fröding, prominent Swedish poet and writer (1860–1911).

10 Hansson (2000), *Förlusten av Norge*, p. 167.

and Hansson's expansive and often conspicuously self-conscious writing, I think there are many meta-levels. What I want to emphasise here is guided by a visual, iconic instance. With its visual appearance but also with the thinking about the end that can arise once one has turned 51 years old, it can evoke a kind of terror, as if one stands before a pagan burial ground. As a reader one feels amazed and slightly redundant or helpless.

NOW THE NOUNS BECOME EXTINCT.

There is another—different but similar—example from the poet Ann Jäderlund's book *I en cylinder i vattnet av vattengråt* (*In a Cylinder in the Water of Waterweeping*) from 2006. A short poem reads (and looks) as follows:

I c a n
Not
l o c k
My s e l f i n
the l i g h t i n
t h e r o o m u n d e r
t h e f o o t s t e p s
the s o l e s / t h e r o u n d
*f o o t ' s s o u l*¹¹

The initial statement “I can / not / lock / Myself in” is interesting, since all words save for ‘not’ and ‘in’ are widened, that is to say, the characters are kerned to be set wide apart.¹² The assertion might appear illogical, even incorrect; and as a way of addressing this the non-widened word ‘not’ becomes critical since it makes the negation's abrogating function wobble. If one removed the word ‘not’ entirely, the clause would collapse in a logically obvious manner. However, one cannot treat a poem in any way. At the same time, further questions arise: Is the ‘I’ of the poem jailed or not jailed in the light and the room? Also the words ‘not,’ ‘lock,’ and ‘footsteps’ are each placed on their own lines so that they attract additional attention. Finally, the ambivalence between the open and the closed that runs throughout the nine lines is not resolved. Rather, the poem deploys this vacillation. The metacritical statement produced by the poem's

11 Ann Jäderlund, *I en cylinder i vattnet av vattengråt*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2006, p. 48.

12 In Swedish, the word “spärra” signifies both “lock” and “widen,” i.e. being “locked in” or “stopped,” but also a widened, or typographically kerned text. The poem engages with this double meaning.

typographical and semantic work actualises what Roman Jakobson once described as an “ambiguity” which is “a corollary feature of poetry.” Jakobson cites William Empson, “The machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry.”¹³ A vital insight for considering Jäderlund’s poem concerning the significance of the poetic ambivalence, in this case revealed in and through the poem’s visual iconicity.

In Jäderlund’s poem—as in “Långröse” above—the interplay between semantics and iconicity enhances the poems’ modes of being and speaking self-reflexively. Despite their possibly epistemological goals, the two examples are not to be regarded as artistic research. They consider themselves in the way in which poetry and literature have always considered themselves. And that is a quality that the artistic researcher in their scholarly practice must not forget.

The ground is ploughed through.

The kinds of readings that capture the literary text’s metacritical gestures are possible within a scholarly literary discourse. But the charge of artistic research is in part another one. Here, the arrangement demands that an author, in writing, comments upon and analyses a text they have written beforehand, and that can appear difficult. The comment runs the risk of destroying a practice, or a literary text. Or, in the best case, it will merely appear uninteresting or ‘primitive’ compared to the literary text’s exposition about itself.¹⁴ This means that the artistic research concerning Literary Composition must occupy the research space in other ways. The conquest must be different, and the furnishing of the space must never be completed. One way of addressing this might be to say that artistic research within Literary Composition to a higher degree should take place *through* rather than *about* literary writing. Or about a literary writing in which a *through* occupies a prominent place.

The sawing of language is ongoing.

13 Jakobson, Roman, “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” in: Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language*. Boston, MA: The Technology Press of MIT and New York, NY, London: Wiley, 1960, pp. 350–377; here p. 371.

14 Staffan Söderblom writes: “[T]he separating meta-level, or self-reflection, would [risk] appearing primitive, even irrelevant, in comparison to what is inscribed in the literary work’s own structure.” Staffan Söderblom, “Anteckningar om senfärdighet – om ansatser till konstnärlig forskning inom det litterära området,” in: *Konst och forskningspolitik – konstnärlig forskning inför framtiden*. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet Årsbok KfoU, 2009, pp. 61–74; here p. 64.

Artistic Writing as Artistic Research. Artistic Research as Artistic Writing

Despite limitations in the empirical material, I do not think I am only engaged in speculation when I assert that artistic research in Sweden was partially transformed when writing and literature entered the field. The inquiries of artistic research concern an artistic doing, a practice, and the scope of the discipline is necessarily impacted when this very doing is manifest as text. When the linguistic and textually evident gesture is commented upon in a similar linguistic, textual gesture something happens with what one very sloppily tends to term critique. The critique or reflection settles so close to what it reflects upon that the two can be difficult to parse. This conflating movement is further enhanced by the establishment of the metacritical parameters I above asserted as palpable and inherent to the literary work.

Now I want to sing softer and deeper.

In her reflections, “On Methods of Artistic Research,” Annette Arlander wonders if not “each artform” should develop “its own scientific methods based on the common working methods” within the practice in question.¹⁵ One can easily agree with that, I imagine. However, even within one specific artform, a general method can be difficult to establish and maintain. The quantitatively limited research produced thus far in Literary Composition at the University of Gothenburg may indicate that the author does not firstly explore others’ work but to a higher degree conducts research through or with the help of the specific practice which also produced the primary work/text. The research bodies at Literary Composition have therefore *not* been part of a process wherein the author at a certain point—during or upon the completion of a particular project—ceases to be an author and is transformed into a researcher. I think (and in some cases know) that the specific author-researcher body has instead strived to create a second form of artistic text, artistic acoustics, in a gesture that at the same time includes a reflection through or via this text, this acoustics.

Perhaps I am talking about the chicken and the egg. But I am also talking about writing as a thinking practice and about an expansion with several different faces. Susan Howe writes about how her long-standing presence of lyrical language has created a specific thought structure, “a habit of thinking

15 Annette Arlander, “On Methods of Artistic Research,” in: *Method – Process – Reporting*. Stockholm: Swedish Research Council Yearbook KfoU, 2014, pp. 26–39; here p. 28.

within patterns of rhythmic phrasing.”¹⁶ This figuration is relevant to what has been produced, relevant to both the chicken and the egg.

Ideas do not generate poetry.

There is a notion—a ‘ghost image’—about artistic research and the artistic researcher, where an interpretive or critical dimension is placed up against (above, next to, below) the work that the artist/researcher has produced. This notion has gained much of its vitality from the fact that this is what artistic research has sometimes looked like. And it has occasionally on vague grounds been described as such. This research position becomes problematic if it beins, in an active way, to haunt the literary text and all its multivalent and metacritical statements. The researching authorial body must place itself somewhere else in the research space, and do something else within that realm.¹⁷ In the following, I will summarise and briefly discuss the three dissertation projects completed in Literary Composition until May 2017. Ghosts exists. But one can keep them at a distance in various ways.

Poetry sometimes generates ideas.

Early on in Mara Lee’s dissertation *När Andra skriver*, one can read that the dissertation at hand will “do theory.” She wants to create tools that do not merely *describe* Other bodies’ positions but also in themselves become “concrete practices of resistance.”¹⁸ Also, Lee is initially clear in her insistence upon the significance of the practice of writing to and within the project. In one of the “entry points” and under the rubric of “The Question at Hand,” Lee writes,

The Writing of Others: Writing as Resistance, Responsibility and Time is a book that is based in literary practice. It deals with the experience of writing out of another body, and wants to show how this experience is intimately bound up with different temporalities that disrupt and interrogate our linear conception of time.¹⁹

To write poetry is a doing—the Greek *poiesis* means ‘to do’—and to break the line, as in the lyric verse, can be seen as emblematic of this dimension of doing

16 The paragraph is quoted from Peter Middleton, “The Contemporary Poetry Reading,” in: Charles Bernstein, ed., *Close Listening. Poetry and the Performed Word*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 262–299; here p. 273.

17 Magnus Bärtås, “Verkberättelse som pilgrimage,” in: *ArtMonitor* 10 (2013), pp. 11–23; here p. 15.

18 Lee (2014), *När Andra skriver*, p. 13.

19 Ibid.

in poetry. Accordingly, lyrical passages constitute a significant element of Lee's dissertation. Another device is "temporal figurations" of Otherness that are named and brought into being. They are called "revans moments," "the eleventh hour," and "stemmed time."²⁰ With the aid of these characters—among other things—the othering becomes procedural, and the reader gains a partially new perspective on an established problem. The same happens in the chapter "Displacements 1. Language Is Our Home, a Home in Motion" where Lee examines and reveals ideologies which, like small doses of arsenic, have permeated and poisoned language itself. Why is 'barnhem'—literally, 'child home' in Swedish—called *barnhem* when it is so obviously not a home. The Swedish idea of 'folkhemmet' ('the people's home')²¹ was, among other things, an attempt to bridge differences, and one step in this process involved the fact that we should all always be at home, "no matter how far away we are."²²

The forest game is a writing game.

Helga Krook's dissertation *Minnesrörelser (Movements of Memory)* consists of six separate volumes with six different senders of whom one is named Helga Krook. The 90-page pamphlet bearing Helga Krook's signature is in one place described as a "coat for a body" and soon after that as an epilogue, while it in another place states that there is no "given order in which the books should be read."²³ Hilde Lindroth, Elisa Adrian, Linda Beel, Grete Wiedrow, and Anja Nauchaum are the translators, editors, cultural journalists, critics, and poets who, together with the "closed-down author" Helga Krook, read, write, and—in another turn yet again—read the material gathered by Helga Krook. The construction of the dissertation aims, writes Krook, to "reach something more complex than what I could have if I had written the dissertation myself."²⁴ I imagine that the construction also aims to stage the critical assertion to be found on page 36 of the Helga Krook volume: "Language contains a history." Different languages from different senders contain different histories.

The research subject Helga Krook asserts that she does not regard "a dissertation in Literary Composition" as a test of knowledge. In line with this idea, she develops a clearly readable movement away from *one* truth-seeking

20 Lee (2014), *När Andra skriver*, p. 16.

21 Also known as 'the Swedish Middle Way,' a political concept central to the development of both the Swedish welfare state and Swedish Social Democratic Party, wherein the nation is conceived of as a small family, and everyone contributes.

22 Lee (2014), *När Andra skriver*, p. 156.

23 Helga Krook, "Berätta för mig II," in: *Minnesrörelser*. Göteborg: Autor, 2015, pp. 17–82: here pp. 26 and 59.

24 Krook (2015), *Berätta för mig II*, p. 13.

interpretation of the gathered material's own claims to an important and problematising discussion about memory and the very conditions for knowledge-transfer. She states, "The project *Movements of Memory* can be regarded as a representation of a narrative problem examined within disparate practices."²⁵ And such a centrifugal movement assumes the consequences of the view of the collected—and for us, non-existent—materials as in themselves an expression of various treatments and distortions.

No choir can be seen coming through the forest.

My dissertation *Hur låter dikten? Att bli ved II (What is the Sound of the Poem? Becoming Firewood II)*, takes up how different acoustic dimensions can appear in and be realised through poetry. It consists of a relatively extensive volume that also includes a CD with five text-sound compositions I participated in producing. At the opening I state, "As part of the dissertation, there is also the poetry collection *Becoming Firewood*," published by Norstedts förlag in conjunction with the completion of the dissertation.²⁶ If one begins to page through and read the dissertation, one will quite soon notice that it contains a range of writing practices or writing attempts and that this disparate collection of materials is, I would assert, conscious—perhaps even methodical—strategy on my part. In the creation of this montage—aided by what the poet Magnus William-Olsson in one place terms "the oscillating attention"—imminent dichotomous hierarchies between, for example, representative and non-representative, between work and critique, between theory and practice can be partially set aside.²⁷ To seek out, test, and realise different writing practices became the approach that guided and set conditions for the exploration, as well as what is not unproblematically termed the production of knowledge. Johan Öberg has stated, "In truth, artistic research is not concerned with the production of knowledge as much as it is in laying claim to knowledge."²⁸ I think this is important, in the same way that it is crucial to continuously assert that poetry is not concerned with production but with processes. With an expansion that, when successful, time and again can surprise the reader. Helga Krook writes in accordance with this about the importance of "refusing to deliver."²⁹

I dig to know what I do not already know.

25 Krook (2015), *Berätta för mig II*, p. 12.

26 See colophon Fredrik Nyberg, *Hur låter dikten? Att bli ved II*. Göteborg: Autor, 2013.

27 Magnus William-Olsson, "Denna oroligt uppmärksamma ensam-med-mig-självpolka i mörkret," in: Magnus William-Olsson, ed., *Methodos. Konstens kunskap, kunskapens konst*. Stockholm: Ariel litterär kritik, 2014, pp. 9–35; here p. 34.

28 Johan Öberg is cited in: "Magnus Bärtås – samtal," in: *ArtMonitor* 10 (2013), pp. 24–31; here p. 28.

29 Krook (2015), *Berätta för mig II*, p. 72.

Conclusion

Just like the body of language constituted by *Minnesrörelser*, neither do the three dissertations discussed here constitute *one* gathered body, *one* shared code. However, I do think that the three works share a desire within the writing subject to, at no point during the research practice, cease to be the author. There is a will to continue to be specific.

As a consequence, the researching author in these three dissertations is not an author as researcher “in their own profession” but an author who researches through the various forms of writing, language, and strategy available to them.³⁰ It is a researcher who arises from and acts within and through the questions that emanate from the ongoing writing practice. It is about flexible relationships, about changes rather than positions. The dissertation as a whole becomes an important attempt to not continuously construct or write ‘the same history,’ the same discourse. It is essential and at the same time very difficult to challenge oneself. And what this challenging act looks like can be highly individualised. I imagine that these dissertations and also future ones at Literary Composition can be a way to challenge what is the established way of writing and being and thinking in the author’s body.

The Hölderlin music is strange.

Translation from Swedish by Jennifer Hayashida.

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30 Hemer (2010), Författaren som forskare, p. 102.

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A Letter to Foucault

Maya Rasker

Abstract:

Investigating in what way some aspects of Foucault's work can be fruitful to 'think' writing-as-research, a letter to Foucault as academic fiction unravels and values the paradoxes that emerge from connecting a dead philosopher's work with the actuality of writing to him. It becomes clear that the Self cannot *not* be addressed when relating to a foreign (beautiful and intimidating) corpus of knowledge. Simply appropriating the philosopher's words was working the wrong way around. In turning to the 'master' for clearance, the position of the 'apprentice,' the one presently speaking, must also be defined. How to investigate oneself from the position of the Self, while opening up for the work one admires? How to relate to *what moves the heart*?

Amsterdam, September 12, 2017

Dear Sir,

Let me begin by saying this is not an easy undertaking: to write a personal letter to you.

First of all, your stellar thinking and rhetorical elegance have always been quite intimidating to me rather than hospitable—or so I thought. Your work as a gesture, as a 'gift,' poses numerous problems of which the question *how to relate* most emphatically comes to the fore. To relate to what inspires and to what one admires (*to what moves the heart*) requires not only a reciprocal gesture that does justice to the gift; it presupposes an ability and willingness to truly appreciate its dimensions and profundity and thus a fair insight in the feasibility of rightful appropriation.

I don't think modesty ever helped with the birth of any good work. On the other hand, a certain courageous humbleness is asked for when relating to what or whom one admires. When reciprocity appears unattainable, what nonetheless should be at the heart of the undertaking is a balance between humbleness and boldness that equals to—responsibility perhaps?

Hence this letter to you.

Let it be clear that to hide in the shadow of the giant (= to keep oneself outside the text) is safe and comfortable—or so it seems—especially when the

stakes are high. When I catch myself in the act of producing a text with such features it annoys me: the prose serves to disguise one's self-imposed limitations (cowardice perhaps?), to quote and rephrase rather than to transform one's own thinking through the words of the other (which are not your own and never will be).

This is what happened: some weeks ago I set off composing an essay with the good intention to investigate in what way certain elements of your work can be fruitful to 'think' writing-as-research (I'll come back to that later), and soon I found myself in the pitfall I just described and that I would so much have preferred to avoid. Writing that essay consisted *not* of re-addressing my own concerns: it was an attempt to re-route yours so to speak within or into the confinements of my subject and rhetorics, serving as a veil to mask my lack of courage in finding and applying my own voice. Instead of opening up, the intended goal was so predetermining that the practice of writing neither informed nor transformed my understanding. It was the wrong way around.

The approach, the point of departure killed my curiosity almost from the very beginning—and thus killed the author.

Let me elaborate for a while on this problem that has been on my mind for some time now: How to relate meaningful and with integrity to what one admires? The issue refers to the problematic relationship between the 'apprentice' and the 'master' (the student and the teacher, the novice and the scholar, etc.) that is: the corpus of a master's teaching and the way an apprentice can—should—internalise this corpus by critically challenging one's own thinking, doing, writing. As I am doing here and now: How to relate to your gift?

Having studied your *Hermeneutics* (in which you address the issue extensively), I've come to the conviction that only from the perspective of the apprentice, one—*anyone*, no matter how learned—can learn and grow; reform and transform, in your words. Thus the initial route points in the direction of the Self, rather than in the direction of the master's finger pointing at some alluring yet distant vistas. To set out on any philosophical or artistic enterprise the beginning is with oneself, with *the noun prosekhei*, the invitation to "apply your mind to yourself" (with which Socrates encourages the shy Charmides to study himself). For if one doesn't investigate oneself at departure, mimesis and unjust levelling lie in wait; false identification on the part of the student (and the flattery on the master's soul, as you wryly add).

However, this invitation to apply the mind to oneself *as a necessary beginning* for the transformation of the Self (as both subject and object of thinking) constitutes a challenging paradox.

This is how I see it: on the one hand, the caesura (Latin: *crisis*) to everything that was before is quintessential for every beginning, which distinguishes it from any other act or event. Otherwise, there would not be a beginning but rather a continuation of some sort. On the other hand, how can 'I' effectuate such a caesura or crisis (Edward Said speaks more drastically of a 'breach' and a 'rupture') within or by myself, if I myself am part of the same 'I' from which I ought to detach?

I am not sure we can unravel this paradox, and I am not even sure we should—paradoxes are, are they not, the zest of life. Possibly I can make the concept productive by bringing its implications into the light of day.

As said, such beginning to apply the mind to oneself suggests, probably demands, a conscious act by myself—as opposed to an event to which one re-acts. In other words, to begin is an act of distancing and of distinction, an intentional interruption, breakthrough, of what appears to be whole or continuous, without the finality of the 'rupture' Said speaks about. And what makes this act of beginning exceptional, daring even, is that it is conducted in good faith, without the expectation of a particular outcome, executed for its own sake. One seeks, in a faithful suspension of belief, the confrontation with the unknown, within oneself and vis-à-vis the outside world.

(Now the thought comes to me, isn't that what writing this letter is all about?)

Marcel Proust, in his *À la recherche*, makes a beautiful attempt to capture what may follow from this paradoxical logic:

What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders; when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking, where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day.*

What these words aim to describe is the option, the possibility of a beginning within and through the Self (*the seeker*—I love the word!) to apply the mind to oneself as *initium* (the beginning of the 'soul' according to Augustinus) as opposed to the *principium* (the beginning of the 'world') for creation. It demands some exercise to imagine such move, let alone make it happen: to try and apply

* Sir: appreciating your insistence on precision, I will reference quotations like these in the post scriptum.

different voices, genres, perspectives, all this ‘toothless’ equipment, to make sense of, and create out of these dark regions.

As you wrote in *Man and his Doubles*, the modern *cogito* must traverse, duplicate, reactivate in a “constantly renewed interrogation as to how thought can reside elsewhere than here, and yet so very close to itself.”

Still I fear I have missed something here, something crucial to connect the two concepts I tried so far to describe and disentangle: First, the meaning of the relationship between the ‘master’ and the ‘apprentice,’ its implications for not just the *noun prosekhei*, the incitement to apply the mind to oneself but also for the *gnothi seauton*, the confirmation in the imperative that one *doesn’t* know oneself, that one nonetheless should strive ... et cetera. And secondly, the necessity in the beginning, *as* a beginning, to act consciously towards this suspension of belief, to heed towards Proust’s “abyss of uncertainty” within oneself, in fact, the fundamental questioning of one’s knowledge and beliefs—for letting them go entirely to keep all possibilities open. The outcome of the junction between those two elements—the master-apprentice relationship on the one hand and the disconnection of the Self from the Self in order to learn, on the other—may result in the creation of meaning. For the creation of meaning (*not* knowledge, that we can only postulate *a posteriori*; *poësis* perhaps?) can neither be situated in its outcome nor in the intent. It is, what creates itself. And: that what creates itself can only do so opposed to, or detached from, what is already there.

Would you say that makes sense?

Let me push this a little further. If we accept that to apply the mind to oneself as a beginning for transformation implies to turn the gaze on oneself, the relationship with the other (not the concept, not the ‘Other,’ but just this other being, be it the teacher or the master, it could be a friend too I believe, or a work of art, or a landscape)—that relationship *must* consist of more than mere identification and mimesis. This relation is at the core of the aforementioned paradox: it implies that the other becomes an inevitable part of myself. Since one simply cannot think the truth about oneself from the standpoint of the Self, one has no option but to suspend one’s convictions and turn to the other for clearance (‘clearance’ in the double meaning of the expression: to make clear, and to give permission to pass, to continue).

Thus, what I have omitted to consider is the implication of the relationship, not its effect or possible outcome, but why this relationship is an *a priori*, conditional, in order to create, to grow.

You said, somewhere, I’m sorry I didn’t observe the source of your remark: *A relation precedes what is related*. It is as simple as it is beautiful. To fully grasp and appreciate the meaning of these words—to put them into action—I want

to turn my mind to the notion of 'love' as in: *what moves the heart*. Hannah Arendt explores this notion in her dissertation *Der Liebesbegriff bei St. Augustin* (little appreciated, that work, but I consider it illuminating in view of her oeuvre that then was yet to begin. Did you two ever met, by the way?). If love is anything, Arendt summarises Augustine, it is a motion towards something, be it something else or something within oneself. Love is unavoidably tied to a distinct object of desire ("the thing it seeks"), and simultaneously it is defined by that very same desire, within me, here and now, to move towards that object. What follows is that this desire (Augustine uses the word *appetitus*) runs in two directions. For what I seek can only be sought for the very reason that I learned of its existence before—in the past. And it reaches towards the future because at present I clearly do not have what I wish for. If I try to visualise this dichotomy, the prime denominator is *absence*—in the present. Perhaps it quite beautifully illustrates what is meant by your words: *the relation precedes what is related*.

The absence, what lacks, determines that indeed there must be a relation. Therefore, it is acutely present, although—and for the very reason of—something is yet in demand. As Arendt points out: what emerges in this absence is not a vacuum but what the vacuum creates—a powerful force. But not just that, I would add: it is this powerful force *to move* (to seek, to create) as a fruitful plane of production.

To establish this 'thinking space' (not as a concept but factual, since I am presently writing this letter to you) between 'I' and myself in and through this act of writing, the creation of such a relation with *you* is imperative. If I honestly intend to relate—not hiding in the giant's shadow—I must confront myself with your massive thinking (the object of my admiration, remember) through establishing this relation.

Intuitively it appears that by means of writing this letter as a work of academic fiction or as a fictitious essay, this fruitful plane of production opens up before me, artistically, intellectually, through the very act. To paraphrase what you once noticed about the essay, it is an exercise of oneself in thought, rather than the simplifying appropriation of others for the purpose of communication.

This is truly not an easy undertaking.

I don't know yet where I am heading, but the journey has been definitely enjoyable so far. Thank you for your patience, Sir.

PS: I just looked it up in the dictionary: *Essayer* in French means: to try, to test, examine, endeavour. A "modifying test of oneself in the game of truth," as you said.

Monday, September 18 (one week later)

Sir, good morning,

It took some time to let land all underlying ideas of what I tried to express, explain, explore in my letter last week, and what it boils down to—not quite, but the sentence intrigues me—is this quote from your text *Las Meninas*: “. . . [I]t is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes what we are saying.” For both you and I and the rest of the world, we all try unrelentingly, with so many words and images and metaphors, to say what we see and to show what we are saying. To relate to and share what is our world, our perception, our imagination. Why bother in the first place?

Let me propose to you an idea, an association, captured in this image:

The picture was taken near a ziggurat build by the Elamites 3,250 years ago. As a matter of fact, it was built in those times when that particular place was not a desert but the green and fruitful delta of the Dez and the Kārūn River; it made sense for men to settle. There are remnants of waterworks on the site: a small sluice, irrigation systems. If one climbs to the top of the ziggurat presently, the Kārūn River can be seen some five miles to the east—massive and impressive but withdrawn. Desert has taken over the fertile grounds.

The square surrounding the ziggurat is paved with heavy tiles, presumably made of clay from the rivers. And here, as you can see, presents itself to me, to



FIG. 4.1 Imprint of a child's foot in a an ancient tile, near a ziggurat, Iran.
Photo: Maya Rasker.

the visitor in the 21st century, the echo of the excited voice of a child not much older than ten years; a playful child that intentionally, out of curiosity perhaps, puts its little bare foot carefully on the surface of the clay tile that is just laid in the sun for drying.

Was it chastened by the foreman for this violation of the smooth surface of the stone? Did the father, being the road man, laugh affectionately? Why was this particular tile used anyway, why was it not simply replaced? Was it perhaps the footprint of a prince, the son of the King for whom the palace adjacent to the ziggurat was erected? Did anyone but the child actually notice at the time the little imprint amongst the tens of thousands of tiles?

What I observed—what made me smile—is the absolute and irrefutable presence of an absence in this little gesture; the account of a life (of a lived life and a futile event) captured for over 3,000 years in the negative. In an oblique way, it reminded me of your observation that the writer's mark is in the end not much more than the singularity of his absence.

Writing, you see, at this very moment, is as if I am, tentatively, intentionally, putting my bare foot on a wet clay tile; something elusive, yet irretrievable results from this act. I do feel your eyes upon me (As the indulgent father? The annoyed foreman?)—

[*Cut.*]

Intermezzo

(*three days later*)

Sir, I wonder: did you notice, while reading, that I got lost?

I obviously didn't, while writing. Until I found myself staring at these words written so far without a clue how to continue, or rather: without a clue where this path was leading me. (And this I know, as an enthusiastic mountain hiker: once you *suspect* you are getting lost—before actually losing your way completely—you must return your steps to the last recognised point where you still had an overview of your itinerary and destiny. In terms of profit and loss, the return is the least waste of time and energy to eventually reach your destination.)

It was the little foot that led me astray. It was my idea that this child's footprint could serve as a metaphor for the master-apprentice relation ... The plan was to jump from there to the thought—to explore the idea—that a student-pupil must be a master himself, just as a master must be an apprentice ... *blablabla*.

Which, of course, is not a bad idea, were it not such a huge cliché. And, I'm bound to admit, the metaphor of the footprint is really lame too.

So, what *is* at stake?

Friday, September 22, 2017

To retrace one's steps to the last hilltop known to the eye, whilst simultaneously regarding and ignoring the massive surroundings of an infinite landscape—that is the assignment for the day; not to start all over again, neither to erase the *Irrgang*, but to continue, taking into account what was gathered and what was lost on the journey.

It was your piece on *Las Meninas*, Sir, which initially attracted my attention to your ways of thinking; the sound reasoning and the meticulous language from which the idea arose that thinking through the act of writing (writing as an act of thought) can, and thus ought to be, as perfectly honed as Brancusi's egg.

Which, as I know, is a fallacy.

(But it is a useful fallacy, just the same way as 'admiration' or 'desire' are forceful, valuable misconceptions that lure you into a not yet or not entirely known world, convincing enough though to maintain the promise that *poësis* can be good for thinking.)

To return to *Las Meninas*: some years ago I came across your text (*No, no!* Vice versa: your text entered my life), in particular, the observation at the closing of your analysis of Velazquez's painting that "the profound invisibility of what one sees is inseparable from the invisibility of the person seeing." That idea or notion has hooked on me ever since because, on an intuitive level, I read it as an indicator how to begin to handle the issue I raised a few days ago: how to relate to what inspires, to what one admires—and to what moves the heart. This may not sound quite clear, I'll explain it.



FIG. 4.2

Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas o La familia de Felipe IV* (1656), oil on canvas. ©Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado.

At first glance we encounter the painter Velazquez painting a portrait of the Royal couple; he is perfectly visible behind his easel, while the canvas has its back turned to us, the viewer. By taking this specific stance, offering a view of the couple in question as just a reflection in the oblong mirror at the far end of the scene, the painter, and with him, the process of painting empathically comes to the fore. To me, the subject of this huge piece is therefore not so much what it shows (painter painting a portrait), not what it stands for (what cannot be represented), but above all the relationship between the painter and me—the viewer. As you observe: the painter stares at this particular point where I am apparently standing, albeit invisible; what he actually sees, what is represented there on the canvas, is also invisible to me, since everything I know is its barren back. So why would he stare at me like that when there is nothing to be seen or to get from?

If I take yet another step back, I am aware that the painter, *as actor*, does something highly peculiar. He makes me switch position with him. He positions me, the viewer, where *he* obviously stands while painting as if to suggest that *I am being incorporated into the work*. Or more precise maybe: this positioning suggests he needs my eyes, needs my perspective, needs my imaginary presence in a “ceaseless exchange” between the observer and the observed, as you call it: a “reciprocal visibility” that embraces a whole complex of “uncertainties, exchanges, and feints.”

This painting articulates in a moving way, so convincing to me that it overbears any other gesture it makes, the notion that the other—in this case: the viewer—is a crucial part of (the work of) the artist.

Let me recall what I tried to lay bare last week, the axis where the *gnothi seauton* meets the ‘master,’ where the beginning to apply one’s mind to oneself is linked to the existence of the other. I then tentatively arrived at the idea that perhaps this junction, this tangent somehow points at the lack itself, the absence where the relation precedes the related.

There opens up before me, not so much as knowledge but maybe as a workable image, the possibility that the other—be it a master (knowing what I don’t know) or a spectator (seeing what I cannot see)—resides perhaps within the Self, is an ‘I’ within the Self that one can search for, that one can invite to step into the light from Proust’s “abysses of uncertainty”; a folded interior, to rephrase your words, that expresses itself in relation to the Self.

In and through the work (as in: the labour)—and in the work of art.

It is, I’ve come to believe, the privilege and the responsibility of the artist (here: the writer), with the courageous humbleness I mentioned earlier, to relate to the abysses of the soul (or whatever word we want to call it), to the

void in human nature, from which the desire comes forth, the will to grow, to transform. And in addition: I believe one can do so only in and through the relation with the other (be it a person or a work—anything outside of oneself), by incorporating the other in one's exercise or investigation. It is said that Montaigne studied himself more than any subject, but I would like to frame the responsibility of the writer a bit differently, in line with your remark that essayism is above all "an 'ascesis,' an exercise of oneself in thought." It is not the Self as such that offers itself up as an object for close investigation. Rather, the challenge is to study oneself as if 'I' were the outsider, another, mere material to work on—that can and should be *fictionalised* to get closer to whatever one strives after. Beauty. Knowledge. Playful exploration. Anything but ... Truth.

*

Dear Mr Foucault, it was truly a pleasure working on this piece.

I am convinced—now more than when I started this letter—that I am far removed from a full appreciation of the gift your work represents. To have received this hunch of another way of looking at my work as a writer is a present I acknowledge with gratitude—by means of this letter to you.

As an afterthought: that picture of the little foot in the tile was taken by me in 2011 near Ziggurat Choqa Zambil, Shoshar, Iran. Knowing you, I'm sure you would like to know.

Yours sincerely,
Maya Rasker

PS: I like to share with you the texts I have worked with while researching and writing this piece. Some you know quite well (having written them yourselves, or, in case of contemporaries, reflected on them), some must be new to you since they were written long after your decease. I hope you appreciate them.

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Writing in Art and Artistic Research



Minor Literature in and of Artistic Research

Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes

Abstract:

This contribution asks how we can situate literature's participation in the artistic research field: is there an advantage to its 'belatedness'? My thoughts go into three directions: institutional affordances; Marcel Duchamp's effects; and the notion of minor literatures. I refer to Aby Warburg, James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Dora García, Brian O'Doherty, and others. For literature, I see the artistic research debate as an opportunity to work in and with the 'minor': a call for solidarity among those in the margins. Through its 'belatedness,' literature can avoid normative elements of the artistic research debate and graduate to describing and valuing the diversity that is being created, recouping the 'artness' of this work—and acting on a systemic level.

Where does artistic research in or through literature already exist, and how can it be shown why and on what terms literature may now join the debate? I contend that considering these questions via Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's concept of minor literature provides a particularly rich approach to a multi-layered phenomenon. The examples advanced here in the argument reflect my experience in the field(s) and do not claim exclusivity. In fact, it is, in my view, clearly an enrichment that the authors of this volume present a great diversity of vantage points and approaches to our common theme.

Institutions

The disciplinary formation of the Humanities in the 19th century has been effected through educational programmes being set up and the formerly (more) universal scholars newly seeing themselves as representing one field that they studied and for which they subsequently established journals, associations and conferences.¹ Obviously, the promise of efficacy (shorter study times) already played a role. It can be assumed that these mechanisms continue to

¹ James Turner spoke at the University of Amsterdam in 2016. See also: James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.

work in the case of artistic research. Tom Holert has shown convincingly that academia courts artists—and that artists have their interests in approaching the university.² While the affordances of each space vary, there is at least one constant that can be described as follows: far away fields are green—or the realms or force fields of art and research are now acknowledged to be more thoroughly intertwined than was the understanding when modernity and progress reigned.³ With closer proximity, players from both sides have had the chance of testing institutional possibilities to the extent that alternative academic institutionalising through artists has taken root. An early example of this was the Free International University for Interdisciplinary Research (FIU), founded by Joseph Beuys and Heinrich Böll in 1974. This loose network of artists and researchers still exists and has sparked great interest on the part of visual artists, and one can observe a trend towards establishing alternative educational entities.⁴ Such initiatives have fed into the imagination of the visual art field more than that of literature.

Literature Departments seem to have catered for creative writers better than Art History Departments for artists. The need for creative writers to take matters in their hands has thus been less pronounced than with artists. As reasons, I can imagine the differently situated battles: rather than trench warfare between (older art) historians and theoreticians—which led many theoreticians to desert art history departments, setting up those of Visual Culture, Curatorial Studies, or Cultural Analysis and seeking the proximity of their more theoretically active colleagues from literary studies—, academics in Literature departments had to contend with the often more positivist mind-set of their linguistics colleagues. All the while, the historical (or other extra-literary) research that creative writers continued to pursue could still appear as a related enterprise, as History Departments—where theoretically oriented—even moved into closer

2 Tom Holert, “Artistic Research: Anatomy of an Ascent,” in: *Texte zur Kunst* 82 (2011), pp. 38–63.

3 Charles Esche, Director, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, has motivated his recent practice as de- or anti-modern, corresponding to Walter Dignolo’s decolonial thinking. Charles Esche, “The Demodernizing Possibility,” in: Paul O’Neill/Lucy Steeds/Mick Wilson, eds., *How Institutions Think. Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse*. London: The MIT Press, 2017, pp. 212–221.

4 Joseph Beuys/Heinrich Böll, “Manifesto on the Foundation of a ‘Free International School for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research,’” 1973, <https://sites.google.com/site/socialsculptureusa/freeinternationaluniversitymanifesto>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018. See also: Tom Holert (curator), *Learning Laboratories*, BAK, Utrecht, December 2016–February 2017, <https://archive.bakonline.org/en/Research/Itineraries/Future-Vocabularies/Themes/Instituting-Otherwise/Exhibitions/Learning-Laboratories>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

proximity to literature in the wake of such positions as Hayden White's, where all history-writing came to be seen as story-writing, subject to "emplotment."⁵

Creative writers in Europe, when not self-taught, are often literary scholars and, therefore, understand these scholars. Even more: while they broadly differentiate theoretical and creative modes, they teach students that different genres of texts can live (peacefully) alongside one another—and they can in their work embody that range. They are (and have for a long time been) both artists and researchers. This state of affairs brings with it a rich form of self-identification, but likely also a decreased need to consider the poetic voice as research *per se*. The supposedly higher status of the academic researcher is already reached, turning 'artistic' work into a welcome escape, rather than something for which that status also and directly needs to be fought. This is e.g. true for W. G. Sebald, who, working at the University of East Anglia, began to write semi-autobiographical fiction with ('poor') images also as a liberating response to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which then only considered his German literary scholarship, not his literary translation or (semi-)fictional writing, to be 'returnable.'

As far as art is concerned, the wholesale incorporation of art academies in UK universities has brought a professionalisation but also a displacement of art history and theory. When art school art history becomes (or is merged with) university art history it tends to cater for art students' more recent interests, instead of representing the field. Art history, due to the discipline's German origins, was also not heard for political reasons, despite the field being represented in the English-speaking world by German Jewish emigrants and their institutions, such as the Warburg Institute in London. Aby Warburg's collected writings were only published in English translation in 1999⁶, and the virtual absence of such inter-weavings of theory and practice—as in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, for example—in the hegemonic self-understanding of the discipline during its institutionalising and professionalising process no doubt contributed to artists wishing to take matters into their own hands. This was in the 1980s, with the advent of New Art History, aided by an understanding of (and envy for) work in literature departments being at once more theoretically rigorous and more creative.

5 Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact," in: Adam Budd, ed., *The Modern Historiography Reader: Western Sources*. Abingdon, New York, NY: Routledge, 2009, pp. 351–364.

6 Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 1999. See also: Giorgio Agamben, "Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science" (1975), in: *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, translated and ed. by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 89–103.

Duchamp Effects

The deskilling⁷ of artistic practices from Dada and Marcel Duchamp, especially since the inception of Duchamp's ready-made strategy in 1917, was seriously felt in the education of artists from the 1960s onwards. Conceptual practices in Duchamp's wake required a re- or up-skilling in historical and theoretical terms: a lingualisation⁸ or linguistic turn.⁹ This, of course, in addition to opportunities for employment: although representatives of this practice such as Seth Siegelaub proved ingenious in finding modes of selling ideas and their simple representations in written form, teaching positions in 'de-academicising academies' proved the most sustainable form of ensuring survival. As a consequence, since the first Colstream Report, in 1960, argued for the intellectualisation of artists' education (the inclusion of art history in the curricula)¹⁰, generations of UK artists were taught by lecturers whose own work resembled research more than object-making. Artists began to live the lives of trans-disciplinary or supra-disciplinary academics, contributing to conferences, rather than exhibiting (or turning their exhibitions into conferences, such as in the case of performance festivals). Since Harald Szeemann's *documenta 5*, 1972, exhibitions also became thematic, orienting artists' activities away from disciplinary allegiance and encouraging transcendence of genres or medium boundaries: artwork and exhibiting became research question-driven.

The high (or low) point of that development saw the introduction of the RAE in the UK, from 1986, in which the staff of the newly university-incorporated art schools had to justify their work in research terms, as predetermined, research-question-driven, documentable, published (e.g. in exhibition-format). More recently, in the renamed Research Excellence Framework (REF from 2014), artistic work has also had to be accounted for as (directly) impactful. The statements required for these exercises necessitated formulating said research

7 Claire Bishop, "UNHAPPY DAYS IN THE ART WORLD? De-skilling Theater, Re-skilling Performance," in: *Brooklyn Rail*, December 2011, <http://brooklynrail.org/2011/12/art/unhappy-days-in-the-art-worldde-skilling-theater-re-skilling-performance>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

8 Wolfgang Max Faust, *Bilder werden Worte: Vom Verhältnis von bildender Kunst und Literatur vom Kubismus bis zur Gegenwart*. Cologne: DuMont, 1987.

9 Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967. On the Duchamp reception in art see also: Benjamin Buchloh et al., "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp," in: *October* 70:4 (1994), pp. 126–146.

10 For a response to this report by a performance artist/educator, Stuart Brisley, see: http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/39/60s/Text/Concerning_the_Coldstream_Report____The_existing_Art_Educational_System/page:2, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

questions, laying open the state of the discourse, naming peer practices and outcomes. These requirements, determining a large portion of one's institution's government funding, correspond to what is required for the degree of a PhD in any discipline, thus stimulating the demand for that degree on the part of institutions, as well as among the hopefuls for university positions in art practice themselves. Benjamin Buchloh's scathing comments from 1990 on (some) conceptual art as breeding or approximating an aesthetics of administration should be seen before the background of that proliferating situation.¹¹ Duchamp's legacy or effect¹² in visual art can be understood as encompassing much exciting, intellectually demanding artwork, generations of artist-philosophers emerging, but it has also institutionally contributed to a bureaucratised state of affairs.¹³

When visual artists use words in their re- or up-skilling moves (RAE reports), they (need to) exercise a—similarly flattened and often stereotypical—understanding of text or language as sufficient evidence for elucidating or standing in for ideas, however poetic their language use in their (artistic) practice. For the examples given, we may refer to the stereotypical alignment of the visual with intuition and the word with intellect.¹⁴ As concerns language, writers in their (predictably) more advanced understanding of the capabilities and deficiencies of their tools can choose to be at home in both registers if and when they choose to—and otherwise (as both Joyce and Beckett did) transgress the boundaries towards the visual field, where they seek the deceptively purer means of expression.¹⁵ Visual artists, by contrast, have had to battle more

11 Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," in: *October* 55:1 (1990), pp. 105–143.

12 David Hopkins, "Re-thinking the 'Duchamp-Effect'," in: Amelia Jones, ed., *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 145–163.

13 Julia Bryan-Wilson, "A Curriculum for Institutional Critique: Or the Professionalization of Conceptual Art," in: *Versksted # 1, 2003: New Institutionalism*, ed. by Jonas Ekeberg. Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art, 2003, pp. 89–109.

14 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Word and Image," in: Robert S. Nelson/Richard Shiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 51–61.

15 In comparing performance art pieces similar to (and predating) Beckett's *Quad*, 1981, I argued that Beckett's transgression of disciplinary boundaries is problematic, not least for his aims. To summarise briefly, he affirms the spatial centre in a way that visual artists (of the time and sympathetic to Beckett, such as Bruce Nauman and Brian O'Doherty) would not have done this. Nevertheless, *Quad* was exhibited as a visual artwork in *documenta X*, 1997. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "Reciprocity: Beckett Interpreted in the Context of Contemporary Art," keynote: *Beckett and Company*, Tate Modern/Goldsmith's College, 6 Oct. 2006. Joyce's genre transgression is mainly to be seen in: James Joyce, "Fluviana," in: *transition* 16/17 (1929), between p. 296 and p. 297. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Joyce in Art: Visual Art Inspired by James Joyce*. Dublin: Lilliput, 2004, pp. 14–18.

against an understanding of their domain as the poorer, less intellectually advanced one, hence thus far showing more impetus to frame it as research—and not conform to the old adage that they should paint and not speak.

Minor Literatures

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have understood what they termed minor literature as deterritorialised (moving a language of power away from its hegemonic, professionalised and bureaucratic space); as a communal enunciation (rather than privileging the single, canonical author); and immediately political.¹⁶

Following 1968, Deleuze and Guattari, in their own work, sought to ‘minor’ not just psychoanalysis, but academic writing in general. Their co-authorship and creatively poetic tone in a relatively low register do not make their texts immediately accessible to (my) undergraduates, but academic writing became more creative, more theoretical (i.e. also inherently interdisciplinary) and less ‘academic’ (Michel Serres e.g. considered quotations as a sign of the material remaining undigested by the author).¹⁷ With that new generation of thinkers gaining academic positions, academic writing can arguably be said to have adopted elements of artistic research, making it less necessary to establish another new discipline. Cultural Studies, Visual Culture, and Cultural Analysis, in addition to enlightened Literature and Art History departments, enabled scholars from a literary studies background to devote themselves to visual culture also, as e.g. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mieke Bal¹⁸ have done: moving between courses and departments devoted to art and literary scholarship – and embracing artists as scholars and PhD candidates also. Moreover, some scholars themselves began to create artworks.¹⁹ In Art History this is not so unusual, as the exhibition has long been seen as a mode of dissemination that slowly but

16 Gilles Deleuze/Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), translated by Dana Polan. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

17 Michel Serres in a lecture at the University of Utrecht, 3 Sept. 2016.

18 Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

19 Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes, *Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do With Art (History)?* Inaugural lecture 537, Amsterdam: Vossiuspers, Amsterdam University Press, 2015. Online: http://www.oratiereeks.nl/upload/pdf/PDF-6174DEF_Oratie_Lerm_WEB.pdf, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

surely (I mentioned Harald Szeemann) gained creative clout.²⁰ With the interdisciplinary scholars just named, literature has in fact already bread an artistic research culture *avant la lettre*.²¹

Elsewhere, I have considered the writings of some visual artists a minor practice: Tacita Dean and Rodney Graham are visual artists who have a long-standing interest in literature—and they write very well.²² I established their production of fictional texts and books as minor in relation not to literature but visual art, owing to their places of distribution (exhibition): art spaces, not (literary) bookshops and libraries.²³ Writing visual artists are not a new phenomenon, in fact, their proliferation has itself functioned as the basis of another collecting/writing/curating/exhibiting project: The Book Lovers.²⁴ The fact that such writings and projects are being exhibited and collected by art institutions points to an interesting development, one spawned and furthered by Art Writing Masters courses for visual artists, such as the inaugural one at Goldsmiths College, University of London, led by Maria Fusco. Writing and publishing have turned into media in which visual artists work—and where they wish to learn the skills involved, i.e. creative writing and publishing. Although Dean and Graham themselves do not (wish to) work as Academy teachers, they have given example to a growing group of artists educated under the strictures outlined above, who are – for all intents and purposes – artistic researchers, active in the writing, publication, collection, and/or exhibition of literature.

Another kind of minor literature, where deterritorialisation should be understood as a move into virtual space, or a copy-paste transposition of the text itself, is Conceptual Writing. Some of its practitioners and contributors

20 For traditional art historians, an exhibition is still, however, not as legitimate a form of publication (in the Netherlands, the NWO Research Council does not consider them as such). This state of affairs leads curators to pursue artistic research PhDs.

21 Artistic Research has thus found advocates and (traditional) institutional frameworks, usually accepting studies as PhD submissions that provided generic (if interdisciplinary) literature and practice reviews, research questions, peer practice investigations and clarification of an original contribution. Whatever looked like a book (also when it contained documented art or curatorial practice) could be examined as a PhD.

22 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, “Considering the Minor in the Literary and Photographic Works of Rodney Graham and Tacita Dean,” in: Mieke Bleyen, ed., *Minor Photography: Connecting Deleuze and Guattari to Photography Theory*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012, pp. 85–102.

23 Tacita Dean, “W. G. Sebald,” in: *October* 106 (2003), pp. 122–136.

24 The Book Lovers is a collaboration between Joanna Zielinska and David Maroto. They have collected novels by (visual) artists. This considerable collection has been exhibited, e.g. at de Appel in Amsterdam, 2014, and it has found an institutional home at M HKA, Antwerp. See: <http://www.thebooklovers.info>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

have originated in poetry circles, others studied art and entered Literature departments, such as Kenneth Goldsmith. They motivate their practice as one derived from the Duchampian legacy,²⁵ and most work in academia (for the reasons mentioned above for other conceptual visual artists). The texts and books produced often identify themselves as non-academic by virtue of a plagiaristic appropriation technique: copying the entirety of a *New York Times* issue (Kenneth Goldsmith), or re-typing Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (Simon Morris). This cannot be academic writing and is also not creative writing, as Marjorie Perloff and Kenneth Goldsmith stress through their book titles *Unoriginal Genius* and *Uncreative Writing* respectively.²⁶ These practitioners are at home in visual art galleries, the internet (*Ubuweb*)—and Fine Art/Visual Culture departments of UK universities. Their academic writing skills—and thus their access as researchers to peer-reviewed journals—are often superior to many of their visual art colleagues, making them particularly useful in the post-disciplinary research environment of the REF.²⁷ When viewed through these examples, it is incorrect to say that there is no established contribution to artistic research in the field of literature. It is just that what exists has often found a home in the distribution and employment modes of visual art—as a field that is close to non- or supra-disciplinarity and can thus encompass literature in and as artistic research.²⁸

Literature's (Late) Inclusion in the Artistic Research Debate

The question of why literature should be included in the artistic research debate—and why now—i.e. whether there are advantages or not; this question

25 Craig Dworkin/Kenneth Goldsmith, eds., *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011; Andrea Andersson, ed., *Post-script: Writing After Conceptual Art*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017.

26 Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010; Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011. See also: Annette Gilbert, ed., *Wiederaufgelegt: Zur Appropriation von Texten und Büchern in Büchern*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012.

27 A good example is Nick Thurston from the University of Leeds. See Nick Thurston, "Publishing as a Praxis of Conceptualist Reading Performances," in: *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, 6:3 (2013), pp. 421–429.

28 For a pre-history of these developments see: Michael Glasmeier, ed., *Künstler als Wissenschaftler, Kunsthistoriker und Schriftsteller*. Cologne: Salon Verlag & Edition, 2012. – This state of affairs may also be compared to (analogue) film, which has sought refuge in (or has been swallowed by) museums. Thomas Elsaesser elaborated on this in a lecture series at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2016.

is for me intimately connected with another: in how far can one describe literature's inclusion in this debate as bound up with notions of the minor? Let me in conclusion sketch a few preliminary points, which, I am sure, the publication of this volume will serve to expand.

As the institutionalisation of Duchamp's legacy has shown, artistic research is an opportunity for creative work to gain value in public discourse by being associated with research, with universities, i.e. with what has for long been understood to be 'major,' the realm where a livelihood can be eked out and status procured. However, universities and the centralising but fragile world of publishing—alongside the carrier of research *par excellence*, the book—have all but lost their major space: economically, politically, and in public life. Instead of attaching itself to something major, I would see the artistic research debate as an opportunity for literature and its practitioners to effect the communal enunciation of an embattled intellectual class, whose pronouncements are now in many countries politically suspect, as they are immediately taken to be political (on the Left). In its deterritorialisation outside of the major, communal enunciation and political immediacy, the artistic research debate has followed the (under-funded, contemporary, and critical elements of the) art sector, and is further expanding into literature. This assumption (conscious or not) of a minor position, I take to be an understandable response, even one of the few potentially viable battle strategies, a call for solidarity among those in the margins.²⁹ Through its 'belatedness' (historically not a complimentary category), literature can avoid the early, normative—and according to Hito Steyerl "boring"³⁰—elements of the artistic research debate and graduate immediately to what is interesting today: describing and valuing the diversity of what is being created, without having to police boundaries, recouping the 'artness' of this work—and acting on a systemic level.

What do I have in mind when proposing this? As two brief examples, and in concluding, I will consider the *Finnegans Wake* reading group as shown by Dora García and the oeuvre of multi-disciplinary writer/artist/researcher Brian O'Doherty.

29 bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in: *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1989, pp. 203–209.

30 A conference on artistic research at dOCUMENTA (13), 2012, was situated within the (art/research/installation) space of Dora García's *The Klau Mich Show*. García established the space originally for a theatre performance that included psychiatric patients. Through the discussions here artistic research debates turned away from normative approaches. Hito Steyerl spoke of how boring she found such normative definitions (which would, of course, have to be undone by the very next project).

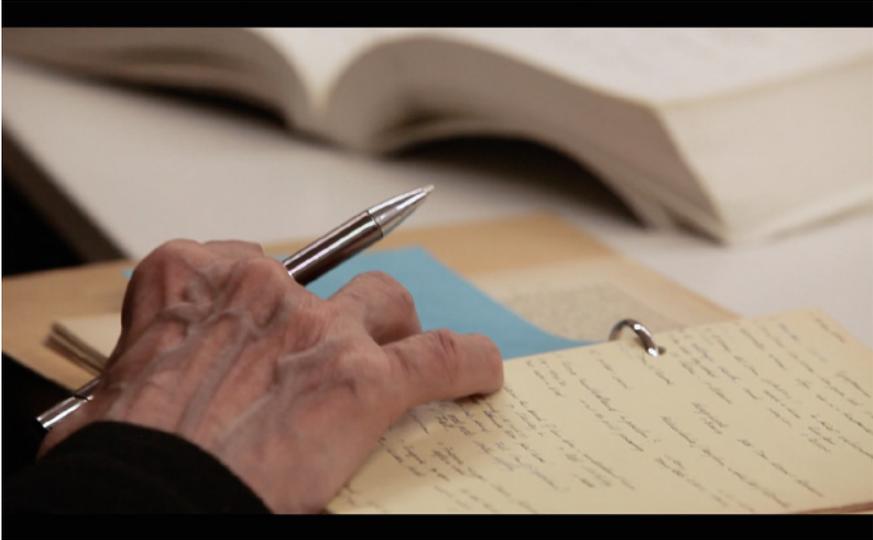


FIG. 5.1 Dora García, *The Joycean Society* (2013). Still from Video.
Image courtesy: Dora García and Ellen de Bruijne Projects.

Reading groups of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* take place the world over, but their status is unlikely to be one of credit-bearing university courses. Despite conjuring and generating academic learning to a high degree, they take place in the margins. Having participated in the one at the James Joyce Foundation in Zurich, I likened the *Wake* reading group to formats within contemporary art (then called relational aesthetics, now social practice).³¹ It is to be situated within the force field of literature, art, and research, or, for our current purposes: literary artistic research. In 2013, Dora García, who had already invited Joyce scholars for what I would call FIU-like discursive contributions to the Venice Biennial, documented the Zurich *Wake* reading group in a film, *The Joycean Society*.³² García is directly inspired by Deleuze's and Guattari's work, precisely their anti-psychiatry stance but also minor literature. The fact that marginal (artistic) research should be so exciting, so ripe for both artistic and scholarly work today, allows one to reflect on the current character of (academic) institutions and the current shifts in disciplinary relations with which I began my discussion.

31 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "The Joyce Effect': Joyce in the Visual Arts," in: Richard Brown, ed., *A Companion to James Joyce*. Malden, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 318–340.

32 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "Mad, Marginal, Minor (Artistic) Research" / "De la recherche (artistique) folie, marginale et mineure," in: Dora García, *Mad Marginal: Cahier #4*, ed. by Chantal Pontbriand. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015, pp. 120–133 and pp. 298–312.



FIG. 5.2 Brian O'Doherty, ed., *Aspen 5+6* (1967). Arrangement: Mary Ruth Walsh, Photo: Fionn McCann.

Brian O'Doherty's medical and perception theoretical research gave him undoubted research credentials early on. He then became a TV presenter on art and a programme director at the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA, which is now awaiting closure). A Booker-prize shortlisted writer of (historical) fiction, he has published on art (inaugurating institutional critique through *Inside the White Cube*) and has created visual art since his student days (choosing for it the pseudonym Patrick Ireland as an activist response against the Bloody Sunday massacre, Derry, 1972). His editorial work includes *Aspen 5+6* (1967), for which he commissioned *The Death of the Author* from Roland Barthes. The arguably 'literary research' activity of commissioning, compiling and editing texts, of including interviews, films, etc. in a white box, has been established as an inaugural moment (an 'exposition') of artistic research.³³ *Aspen* can also be understood as one of the first conceptual art exhibitions.

Indeed, O'Doherty's multi-disciplinary practice constitutes a particular Duchampian legacy, as he 'portrayed' his friend Duchamp using an electrocardiogram: the mute, 'uncreative' artist of the 1960s thus still created form and evidenced that there could be no concept or thought without a body's beating

33 Lucy Cotter, "Between the White Cube and the White Box: *Aspen 5+6*," in: Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, ed., *Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland: Word, Image and Institutional Critique*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017, pp. 57–79.

heart. Most importantly here, O'Doherty proved Benjamin Buchloh wrong (at least differentiated his views, or even answered to his hopes) well before the essay on the bureaucratic aesthetic of conceptual art was written: through O'Doherty's (a conceptual artist's) deliberately bureaucratic investment (in the NEA), he rendered (not just his own) conceptual art as systemically thinking, researching, and acting, rather than sterile and bureaucratic. Brian O'Doherty has used art where literature³⁴ or research were expected, and vice versa.³⁵ He lets the symbolic, creative domain operate in real-world contexts – and he also brought real-world concerns (the art market) into our conscience as operational in art spaces, both literal and discursive. To enter literature in the artistic research domain is thus not 'progress,' it is an invitation to join in minor, de-modern, strategic, holistic, and systemic work. As such, the development we are charting is hopefully (albeit likely paradoxically) efficacious: like art, literature, and research—each in the others' spaces.

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34 In 1975, Brian O'Doherty submitted to Praeger Publishers, from whom he had received an advance, not the expected manuscript on *Art Since 1945*, but a sculptural object so inscribed, made of painted wood.

35 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, "Introduction, or the Crossdresser's Secret," in: Lerm Hayes (2017), *Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland*, pp. 9–25.

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Writing Scripto-Visual Costumes and Columns of Air

Redell Olsen

*It is a 'work', if it may be so called, named Frameworks. It is a lengthy, fragmented, and difficult set of speculations, arguments and assertions as to how a column of air could be identified and defended as a work of art or not. But a column of air could be described in many ways. You couldn't easily point to it. Immediately the problem of the 'metaphysical' location of the work of art was encountered. Was it a column of air or was it a sort of fictional entity? Was it the argument, the 'theory' and speculation or the text? The object was being made by the text. Its independence as an art object was being eroded. Many of the dematerialised clichés of post-minimalism are present but the art object risks the condition of mere 'as if' insofar as the object—turns into text and the conventional powers of the artist are transformed into those of a participant in discursive talk. Mel Ramsden discussing *Frameworks* (1966–1967). (Art & Language, Tate Papers, 2004).*

In “The Trouble with Writing” Charles Harrison describes the work of Art and Language with an avowed sense of suspicion for the literary:

Much of the work of Art & Language is written. Some of this writing has been hung on walls or stuck on walls, some painted on walls, or printed on paintings, or stuck to paintings. Some of it has been published in books and catalogs and journals. But none of it wears the costume of literature. It is *artists' writing*.¹

I wonder if *Frameworks* (Art & Language, 1966–1967) with its famously “identified and defended” column of air is as unliterary as Harrison suggests? Much as I admire Harrison's critical writing, I can't help

wondering if his ideas of the literary are somewhat lost in an idea of literature more relevant to the 19th-century novel. The phrase “costume of literature” is a troubling one that captures the long-standing distrust of art and artists for the literary even as the use of language has become, since the 1970s, relatively commonplace in the domain of artistic practice. The term “costume” carries with it the now rather rare if not obsolete sense of “costume” as linked to the style of an artwork in relation to the expectations of its historical and cultural context. On a basic level, Harrison’s turn of phrase probably alludes to the modes of writing and language use more commonly found in literature than art of the time such as: narrative, description, and figurative language. This interpretation would soften his apparent disavowal of the literary into a simple acknowledgement of the different historical and social domains of these two artistic fields of research and practice. These prohibitions are less adhered to in recent work, but the suspicion between disciplines remains. The term “costume” also carries with it the weight of a long history of intellectual snobbery

Costume and fashion have a long history of being derided by serious intellectuals:

“Nothing else is garish apparraile, but Prydes ulcer broken forth.”
 – Thomas Nashe,
The Anatomie of Absurditie (1589)

“Fashion is the abortive issue of vain ostentation and exclusive egotism: it is haughty, trifling, affected, servile, despotic, mean and ambitious, precise and fantastical, all in a breath – tied to no rule, and bound to conform to every whim of the minute.”
 – William Hazlitt,
On Fashion (1818)

and criticism in this mode usually reveals a bias against fashion as an art form alongside the consumer of fashion who is often a woman. Of course, Harrison's focus is not fashion or gender, and this imposed diversion into costume raises a set of concerns that are not the focus of Art & Language. Nevertheless, it is a significant phrase as it captures some of the difficulties that I want to *dress* here in relation to conceptual art and writing. In the same essay, Harrison describes three (and only three) categories of writing available to artists: "writing conceived as documentary accompaniment to artistic practice, writing conceived as literature, and writing conceived as art."² It is the last of these possibilities that he is principally concerned with. There is, of course, no mention of poetics or a writing that

- ALAMODE : thick silk (1692)
- APYKED : embroidered (Chaucer)
- ARMAZINE : strong corded silk (16th century)
- CHEMISSETTE : lace frill to fill neckline (1505)
- FOREPART : stomacher
- FRISSETTE : band of artificial curls on forehead
- INCARNADINE SATIN : crimson in shadows, pink in highlights (16th century)
- LAPPEMANTLE : apron
- MARRY-MUFFE : coarse cloth
- PURFLE : embroidered edge of garments
- RASH : inferior stuff
- WEEPER : mourning hat band or widow's white cap
- ZONE : girdle
- OED

**This column of AIR
FLICKERS with very
different COSTUMES
of art forms**

begin to look away from seeing and reading the dematerialised artwork; there emerges a new possibility, a poetics of flickers that crosses through the categories and hierarchies imposed by others or

blurs the distinction between any number of these categories. It is worth asking whether certain strains of conceptualism depend on the assumption of such categories in order to maintain the assertion that writing could be a replacement for the messy complexities of painting? If language is approached as a painter might approach the possibilities of paint, then such categories would soon dissolve.

Harrison's description of this suspicion of literary costume is published over thirty years after *Frameworks* was conceived, and so cannot be said to be part of the initial "costume" of expectations surrounding the first wave of conceptual art at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. It is written from a position of reflection, one that is nearly ten years after what many feminist critics, such as Nina Felshin, writing in the mid-1990s, identified as a continuation of the work of the feminist artists from the 1970s to recognise and incorporate "traditionally feminine materials" such as fabric, sewing and

In "The Response As Such: Words in Visibility" (1991), Charles Bernstein criticises contemporary artists for their bland use of text and accuses many visual artists of "seem[ing to be] hostile or ignorant of the literary or poetic traditions that are relevant to their language use."³

Of Course, This One is For You Language and Art

Arrive at the place on the **WHITE CARD** with walls at least the writing seems insured.

This column is hair

writhing reads itself **THIS WAY** time can be said

and I am saying it as

clothing as “viable subject matter and formal means for art.”⁴ In her article Felshin draws attention to the then “recent tendency among contemporary [female] artists to represent clothing as abstracted from the human body”⁵ These artists were pursuing the possibilities of costume not as extraneous and ornamental but as both form and content of their work. In the same issue of *Art Journal* Emily Apter highlights the long line of feminist critics: Joan Riviere, Lucy Irigaray, Michele Montrelay, Mary Ann Doane, Judith Butler, Joan Copjec who have taken up the possibilities of costume and masquerade as an important philosophical and conceptual space through which to consider the constructed nature of the feminine.

A previous generation of Feminist artists of the 1970s had already incorporated the discourse of philosophy into their practice and moved towards an often unstable and flickering

I AM NOT OUT OF THE WORDS YET

Worried enough
about being
a mere costume

of letters,
I forgot *you*
were wearing
a dress
or is that *Art*

& Language
My writing
smock?

Overheard,
really, so
they hate
that literary
stuff.

WHAT FANNY

I, a-pool-of-cheese

surface of scripto-visual possibility. This term was used by the artist Mary Kelly in the 1970s to describe an emerging hybrid practice that combined writing, image making, and the incorporation of objects, including clothes, into her work. Her *Post Partum Document* (1973–1978), an installation which traces the development of the mother/son relationship from birth until the infant's acquisition of speech, exemplifies the practice of the scripto-visual as one that refuses the boundaries of existing disciplines. The text is comprised of a variety of textual materials, including soiled nappies, feeding charts, stains, folded vests, diagrams, a mother's diary entries, and her son's first attempts at mark-making. Through *Post Partum Document* Kelly engages with the personal, social, and artistic constraints which shaped her as both a mother and as an artist. It is these constraints which shape the process of her investigation into discourses as diverse as drawing, science, autobiography, and theory towards a new literary and artistic possibility for the consideration of the necessary *costume* of the age.

funny
sort of

AS I SUSPECT

he quotes
Horace and
expects people
to come
back smiling

*with Ut Pictura Poesis
is Her Name*

EVEN

which it rarely
is but could be
FAIRLY RADICAL

as a tattoo
if I didn't have to
watch her slip
down the bill

or into
the middle

As Lucy Lippard points out, Kelly's hybridity in this early work entails the disruption of customary feminist biological/ autobiographical approaches that are usually associated with archetypal representations of the mother and child.⁶ Instead, the text poses the problem of how to represent what has been omitted from the traditional discourses of motherhood. Kelly overturns the stereotypical representation of the mother as cultural object by producing a scripto-visual record of process. Her work asserts that the type of subjectivity explored by the scripto-visual is multilayered and various as it emerges from the points at which stain, mark, word, image, and utterance overlap in an articulation of the difference between the "unified transcendental subject of autobiography" and the "decentered, socially constituted subject of mutual discourse."⁷

age of
never-heard-of-her
oblivion.

It is true
the Seventies
have never been
more fashionable.

Whose for market?

The problem of us
all mistakes itself
as dress-up.

It is true
the Seventies
have never
been more
Sexist.

You couldn't
easily point
to that
with no hands

LOOKCRAFTY

Kelly further genders this gap; she claims that the scripto-visual allows her to “show the difficulty of the symbolic order for women” to stress how the production of the subject “is primarily a question of positionality in language.”⁸

In a piece from Kelly’s *Documentation I* (the first part of *Post-Partum Document’s* six installations) several pairs of stained nappies are displayed with a timetable of foods ingested by the baby. The type-written words about eating are faint to the point of being like a **nearly illegible stain**.

my disciplinary norms aren’t faking it terribly convincing as **nothing doing**

so much black ink or afterall that only the imprint

no medium specific recursive structures here.

All Flies on YOKO.

Well, except that I’m feeling this deep inside from my language

LOOKNOLYRE

perspective. Stop

CUT your quota

of a Xerox scanned

of feeding. **Neither text is legible in the conventional sense**, but both can be read or seen as a type of writing in revolt at conventional forms. A child's costume is offered as an invitation to consider other possibilities at the selvedge of meaning where lines might and do cross.

no harm done
in the web
of ghostly

tradition
was all I had as
proof.

You mean that
existentially
I presume?

Someone says
looking for
an argument,

'Not especially,'
I say, like
it might be
time to go

home as the uncanny

This was before

I noticed that

Mira Schor's 'Dress Book' (1977) explicitly connects the representation of femininity with costume. In her notes to the piece, she writes: "It is a role and costume that women are allowed, indeed encouraged, to put on and take off, to 'change' throughout their lives. The dress as an image in itself in art, separate from costume in figurative painting, emerged from permission given by the feminist art movement to explore female experiences as subject matter for high art. The dress is a second skin, and in many contemporary artworks skin itself becomes another veil of costume."⁹

Joan Riviere, author of
'Womanliness as Masquerade'

was a court dressmaker before she became a writer and psychoanalyst.

Schor emerged onto the West Coast arts scene during the 1970's. Schor's parents were Jewish immigrants from Poland, and Schor links her family history to her interest in language, pointing out that "[t]he child of an immigrant is traditionally the family interpreter."¹⁰ How this role of "interpreter" manifests itself in relation to art's practice is an important characteristic of Schor's work, who reinterprets her own personal relationship to language through an exploration of its visual forms. Interpreting her work becomes as much about seeing as about reading: "The writing as image was as much a metaphor of language-based thought as it was text to be read."¹¹ Schor's "Dress Book" (1977), consists of body size translucent layers of rice-paper which were covered in writing. According to Schor the "elegant indecipherability" of her handwriting could be read as "an image and metaphor of female thought."¹² At first glance, this assertion raises problems suggesting, as it does, an equation of the murky, the opaque with writing by women. If, however, we consider Schor's assertion in the light of the practice itself, it becomes evident that what she is actually stressing

the whole field
was speculative

as gold was
once now all
out in the bins

on the hunt

for the lost
bite at
the ephemera
cherry
to make
sense of our
burst
shelves.

**Its all about
talk now.
You said.**

You and me,
talking it
up, you know

this one
is for
you
let's participate
a little

is the relationship between the scripto-visual elements of the work—i.e. the marks and handwriting on the translucent paper, elements that, in terms of signification, place the work in a territory that must be negotiated by both “reading” and “seeing,” practices which are usually reserved for apparently distinct disciplines. Important to Schor was the interaction between this piece and the viewer: “[Y]ou could go up to the ‘woman’ / artwork, turn its pages, trying to read her text (which was personal and autobiographical).”¹⁵ The reader/viewer is asked to respond both to the work’s physical and material characteristics as well as to its semantic properties.

Schor’s work also has affinities with the hybrid practice of the late Nancy Spero. Spero’s 1967 works of gouache on paper, “Love to Hanoi” and “Bomb and Victims to Individual Shelters” take on forms that are reminiscent of both bomb clouds and full-length dresses. From 1969 Spero’s work combined image and text in painting and type-writer collages, which extend on long scrolls of paper, and she produced

In an essay on the filmmaker Chris Marker, the poet Susan Howe describes the close similarities between her practice as a poet and that of the filmmaker who uses “split sequences, ‘disruptive-associative montage’” and places “emphasis on the mysterious patternment and subliminal structures of images (icons).”¹³ For Howe Marker’s film *Sans Soleil* is about editing and quotation.¹⁴ Howe recognises her working methods in the practice of Marker, who she describes as recording the “sensitivity to the sound shape (even in silent film) of each pictured event” and shows an “awareness of the time-mystery of simultaneous phenomena (co-occurrence and deployment).”¹⁶

Benjamin Buchloch reads Spero’s “duality of painting as writing and of writing as painting” in ways that are relevant for the consideration of Howe’s own work. He describes how Spero’s methods are crucial

scripto-visual installations that have been screen-printed directly onto the gallery wall. The scripto-visual is for Spero a way of representing the effect of pain on language. Pain which not only resists language but destroys it. In “The Codex Artaud,” the illegible “stutter” of visual marks and traces becomes a vehicle for expressing the corporeal pain of the incarcerated writer. This relationship between the scripto-visual and an investigation of the corporeal body is also evident in Spero’s “Notes in Time” (1976–1979) series, which collages together witness accounts gathered by Amnesty International of torture, brutality, and missing persons in the dictatorships of Chile, Argentina, and El Salvador. In this sequence, Spero uses a mix of handprint and typewriter collage. The illegibility of words and phrases that have been wiped out, printed over, and smudged into one another, seems to suggest an attempt to document the lives of the disappeared through a practice which foregrounds the material effacement of letters and phrases.

for a redefinition of the hierarchies and boundaries of discourses between the visual and the verbal:

Not only are the literary dimensions of culture invoked in a gesture that mourns the hermetic inaccessibility of those cultural legacies, but the literary dimension is also reinscribed as an aggressive challenge to the myopic definitions of the *pictorial* in the modernist framework and of the *linguistic* in conceptual art.¹⁷

The scripto-visual is not only a visual category; it is also a mode of writing.

Not the poem as idea as idea but ideas in words as words. Not that the poem does not think that words are not made of materials. Not the dematerialisation of the poem but the intermittent re-materialisation of the word as object. Not an assumption of language as transparent but an exploration of its densities. Not that what is the matter with poetry matters to art much anyway. Not that it sells anything. Not that the poem can even call itself a work. Not that it wants to work even. Not that poetry is not thinking matter. Not that poetry is not a matter of thinking. Not that the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the poem. Not that poems are without materials called words, called concepts sometimes. Not

I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women (2011) was conceived by its editors as a riposte and an extension to the remit of the *Anthology Against Expression* (2011). For many writers, particularly female writers, this anthology—while widely taken up in the very contexts of possible overlap between visual arts practice and poetics—seemed to miss some of the scripto-visual connections and conversations between philosophy, poetics, feminism, and art that had been underway for some time across the poetry and the visual arts. The editors of *I'll Drown My Book* brought together writing by female writers working out of and alongside the conceptual approaches to writing made possible by modernism, Conceptual Art, Language Writing, and a previous generation's feminist articulation of a scripto-visual practice across many different media.

that poems are without these. Not that these do not call into question concepts and make them happen, or not. Not that conceptual is the only way of calling thinking in art that. Not that the poem does not think for itself already before it gets called one. Not that it does not already consider language as a conceptual figure. Not that the poem is not aware of traditional verse forms. Not that it does not know how to be one of them. Not that it is not one ever. Not that this is anything new in poetry and not necessarily conceptual in the least. Not that all of the planning and decisions need to be made beforehand. Not that whose hand is writing is not mattering. Not that this poem could not be found already existing elsewhere as a roadside sign. Not that poetry can proceed further without

In her introduction Laynie Browne points out the limitations of the prevalent use of the term conceptual writing:

"The fact is, that the term 'conceptual writing,' for better and for worse, has thus far often been employed to describe a set of writing practices which seem, nonsensically, to preclude particular content."¹⁸

The section headings of *I'll Drown My Book* (process, structure, event, matter) reveal as a differing attitude to form from Goldsmith and Dworkin's anthology. The writing in *I'll Drown My Book* approaches language not as a transparent medium but as a material site of discovery, out of which ideas can be shaped. The investigations and explorations of the material properties of language—which often

an exploration into the materials necessary. Not that the execution of the poem is a perfunctory affair that does not care if it is one. Not that the form becomes a machine that makes the poem by forgetting what it was made of. Not that it is not natural. Not that the poem does not question nature.

includes overlaps with mark and image making— are foregrounded in relation to its social and contextual tensions and associations of words. Not that art is anxious about what poetry thinks. Not that art is always thinking. Not that art thinks much about what poetry is thinking. Not that the poem could be anything more than itself.

Not that the poem knows what is understood as poetry but is questionable as that. Not that the poem knows everything including what it might be. Not that the poem could be just that. Not that the poem could be one necessitates it being one. Not that the literary is anxious about what art thinks. Not that writing is always thinking. Not that the writing could be anything more than **two columns of air flickering with a poetics of the scripto-visual, some half-glimpsed possibilities, costumes still to be cut writing across boundary seams.**

Endnotes

- 1 Charles Harrison, "The Trouble with Writing," in: *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 2001, pp. 3–34: here p. 3.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Charles Bernstein, "The Response as Such: Words in Visibility," in: *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* 9 (1991), pp. 3–8: here: p. 6.
- 4 Nina Felshin et al., "Women's Work: A Lineage, 1966–1994," in: *Art Journal*, 54:1 (1995), pp. 71–85: here p. 71.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Lucy Lippard, "Foreword," in: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999 [1983], pp. xi–xvi: here p. xiv.
- 7 Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, p. 23.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Mira Schor, "Women's Work: A Lineage, 1966–1994." *Art Journal* 54:1 (1995), p. 76.
- 10 Mira Schor, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997, p. 210.
- 11 Schor (1997), *Wet*, p. 211.
- 12 Schor (1997), *Wet*, p. 210.
- 13 Susan Howe, "Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker," in: Charles Warren, ed., *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film*. Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996, pp. 295–343: here p. 300.
- 14 Cf. Lynn Keller, "An Interview with Susan Howe," in: *Contemporary Literature* 36:1 (1995), pp. 1–34: here p. 27.
- 15 Schor (1997), *Wet*, p. 210.
- 16 Howe (1996), *Sorting Facts*, p. 300.
- 17 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Spero's Other Traditions," in: Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, pp. 239–244: here p. 243.
- 18 Laynie Browne, "A Conceptual Assemblage. An Introduction," in: Laynie Browne et al., eds., *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*. Los Angeles, CA: Les Figues Press, 2011, pp. 14–17: here p. 15.

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No Assignment for Cowards: What Is to Be Gained through Interdisciplinary Research?

Maria Fusco

Abstract:

This text explores the uses of interdisciplinarity as a form of ethical cohabitation utilising my directorship of the seminal programme “MFA Art Writing” at Goldsmiths, University of London, as case-study.

In 2008, when I set about animating the new, academic format that Goldsmiths had constructed to be able to employ me, I felt like a taxidermist who had just succeeded in stuffing a leopard realistically.

I devised and led MFA Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. It was the first programme of its kind internationally drawing diverse artistic, literary, and theoretical actants to its corps and to teach writing as a *studio practice*. We were stationed in an art department: universities do, after all, often administratively and interiorly resemble militarist compounds.

Working with my three new, esteemed, colleagues—Yve Lomax, Michael Newman, and Adrian Rifkin—who were as fresh as I to the ‘proper-naming’ of this new academic subject area of art writing—I began to notice I was writing the word ‘negotiate’ a lot more than I ever had done before, in university papers and emails. I even learned to spell it correctly through repetition; another word I still find hard to spell.

Before we started working with students, I had six months to pick apart what writing as contemporary art, what writing as *practice* meant, and, to write a programme which could actually *teach* it. I knew we had to be clarion. There were no exemplars to draw from; this did not suit me. At that time, I would have preferred if there had been a concurrent programme, which I despised, so I could drool over, lacerate, and improve upon it. When MFA Art Writing eventually ceased, I noted, with some surprise, that colleagues from subsequent like-minded programmes in different institutions did exactly this, and realised it to be an ugly tactic: from this I have learnt there is no shame in dreaming.

I have read that the invention of a new tool is an act of frustration: this, I know to be true. Over the programme’s lifespan, many tiny, pedagogic tools

of special manufacture were needed to tease, tweak, ratchet, and knock our teaching methods into fit purpose. It was essential to keep snagging.

MFA Art Writing quickly recruited a tight cohort of talented, hardworking, and determined students; we collaborated to define what art writing *might be* (my preferred phrase) through actually doing it. I did not believe in giving postgraduate students briefs to work on; rather I invited students to come with a research project that the programme would engage with critically and improve through teaching: in this way the MFA had the research characteristics of doctoral study. This collaborative method of aporetic working is marvelously productive when everyone shares with an open heart, a brimming brain, and a harsh tongue: this moment is the luxury of starting something new with excellent people.

In order to facilitate aporia, it was essential not to be sure. To communicate this uncertainty with confidence through practice, with authentic scholarly rigour, outwith of the bushed infrastructural support of legislative academic context was the vulnerable aim.

Over the years, students sought out the programme from undergraduate disciplines including fine art, literature, music, politics, theatre, and visual theory. Most were entirely dissatisfied with what they had got in their undergraduate education and somehow wanted *more*. The former art students felt their writing had not been taken seriously in a studio context but, for the first semester, they mourned the death of the art object. The former literature students felt experimental modes of writing had been smothered in favour of a linear plot but, for the first semester, they insisted on knowing how it was all going to end. The former music students felt distinct critical writing methods were needed to *hear* properly but, for the first semester, they asked why everything was so quiet. The former politics students felt the erosion of noble concept but, for the first semester, insisted on authenticity. The former theatre students felt characterisation was over-rated anyway but, for the first semester, did not read out their work in their real voice. The former visual theory students felt motif was anti-ideological but, for the first semester, proposed a diagrammatic answer to each rhizomatic problem.

What was at stake in the first few months of the students participating in the programme—the multivarious bereavement of decontextualisation—was, I believe, the polygamy of discipline seeking the harmonious relationship of mutual benefit. To pinch a *clichéd* ‘university’ word, this was *challenging* in the extreme, for all of us. To be precise, what was *challenging* was exactly this: What is to be gained through interdisciplinary research? This question will never be exhausted. I will pose it again: What is to be gained through interdisciplinary research?

My favoured answer to this question is that to be the amateur is vastly preferable to being the professional, for the amateur proceeds with alacrity and resourcefulness. By its nature, interdisciplinary research renders each of us precarious, each of us the amateur—by necessitating as it does adaptation across discipline boundary. And here, I mean intelligent adaptation which is not reactionary but rather purposefully generous.

This situated approach to how MFA Art Writing worked, at its core the entanglement of words through the fields of art and literature, was a temporal imperative, not a taxonomical, one. There is currently still no satisfactory definition of ‘art writing’—I am often asked to provide one; I will not—it is still a contested term. The most sincere expression of art writing as a field is found in the galore works of those who practise it.

Coming to writing this text and again considering why I wilfully choose to situate not only my research but also my current teaching as interdisciplinary I am drawn to the word I used in a previous paragraph: that word is ‘generous.’ For generosity is crucial to successful, propagative interdisciplinarity research because it articulates and then tends to an ethics of cohabitation, by ensuring that the assembled group take individual, not individuated, responsibility to communicate effectively and to listen with care. When interdisciplinary groups come together in this way the plural pronoun—‘the we’—is not embarrassed to admit that we are unsure, despite abundant confluent knowledge, ‘the we’ must each time start anew, not knowing how to finish.

I witnessed this.

*Postscript: I have decided not to include any references for this text—although clearly my thinking is not autogenetic, and is informed by voices other than my own—because I want the text to stand alone, as my opinion, not as conceit.

Something More and Something Else: Language as Excess and Material [3]

Daniela Cascella [1]

31 March 2017 [2]

In this essay [4], I will consider my activities through writing and with writing [5] as a case study [6] to expose the necessary coexistence of research and specific literary procedures [7]. I will do so by outlining a type of research-into-writing/writing-into-research [8] that employs language as excess and material [9]—an approach generated by a number of reflections and writing gestures through the work of other writers and poets (Clarice Lispector [10], Bhanu Kapil [11], Alejandra Pizarnik [12] among others) and shaped by writing in English as a second language; writing as a stranger in a language [13].

I will also discuss my role as a writing tutor in an art school [14], along with the generative implications of teaching writing through poetry, “ultra-translation” (Antena), “trancelation” [15], and hybrid forms [16]. The essay will reflect on forms of embedded reflexivity enabled by listening, which become active motors and materials of research, rather than fixed tools of presentation [17].

[1]

I write this:

- as a writer—not a theorist, not an academic;
- as a writing tutor—not a theory teacher—in a Fine Art MA, who supervises the final text submission in which students are expected to reflect and to reflect on their research and work;
- as an Italian writing in English as her second (or third, or fourth, if you count a dialect or two) language: displacing, deranging writing and selves as a stranger, displaced and deranged in a language;
- as a writer who inhabits literature as a transmission of materials drawn from music, sound, visual art, film, and literature;
- as a writer who never stopped listening.

Imagine these pages are read to you, in an awkward acquired British accent which betrays Italian inflexions when caught unguarded in certain vowels and misplaced emphases. Imagine the sounded shape of these words—written, read, and heard—in a traffic between languages, in peripheries of sense. Imagine the sense of these words, never deadlocked in the confines of a discipline but sometimes, painfully, deadlocked in a definition of otherness externally enforced. Imagine a sense of writing never entirely aware of how words sound like—“groundless but not without ground,” a writer once said.

“Groundless but not without ground,” said Elfriede Jelinek in her 2004 Nobel prize speech, a forty-minute drift from the edges of literature and the excess of language, haunted by the spirits of Lord Chandos and Ingeborg Bachmann.¹ I want to consider this groundlessness not without ground as the place of artistic research articulated and disarticulated through literature, its words unstable yet necessary, and to retain its discomfort and difficulty—not as a trophy to display, but as a prompt for enquiry and writing. Literature, I mean, away from purity, perfection, confinement: as tension, desire, imperfection, out of synch, ugly even.

[2]

This abstract was written in March 2017 at the end of a troublesome year: referendum, exclusions, unspoken omissions. It reflects the uncertainties experienced at the time as it demanded to embrace them, rather than set them aside. It demanded a statement of excess which would have otherwise been contained; it demanded to state that such excess puts pressure on language, and *this* is the space of literature. Sometimes, a form of an outburst of unease. A place for rebeginning. Sometimes a cadence, a rhythm, an arrangement, out of synch. A convulsion in stillness. [4]

On paper, the following words were put together intermittently between 21 August and 15 September 2017, in a relatively calmer period during which I revised other texts, prepared public readings, continued reading, and collecting thoughts into pages, not one excepting the other, one growing into the other. These words unfold out of a much longer timespan, which exceeds the timespan of the writing of this text, and of my life. Consider the interferences of different states of time, and of mind; the long stretches of time into writing, the moments of stillness, the thinking that goes into words, out of research and out of sorts, and in excess of words, “the meandering off a theme, the escape from

a word and at once the hunt for words, their dismissal,” which Fleur Jaeggy designated as “mental manners of writing.”²

[3]

“Something more and something else than words,” wrote Alejandra Pizarnik to voice that form of maladjusted literature trickled from the pressures that *being* put on her writing.³ Hard to imagine the poet articulating ‘research’ as a confined activity, detached from writing, doing, life. Research, then: not between inverted commas, not in the capital, not pointed at but carried out—and carried very much *within*, shaped through marks as much as erasures, such as the small blackboard Pizarnik used to write on, day after day, and erased, sentence after sentence, and again, until only a handful of words would remain. Literature for artistic research likewise: doing as much as undoing, attention as much as waste, and wait, through writing. Adjusting the glance, and the ear: precisely.

I now realise I should have written, in the abstract, “language *as writing* as excess and material.” The doing of writing embeds the research that exceeds it, and moves research into literature, no inverted commas marking their territory, rather: transits, traffics, pauses, erasures.

[4]

I began to write an essay—and *this* happened instead: an arrangement of tones, instructions, and summaries, outbreaks, echoes of selves, not all mine.

[5]

I want to tell you of a series of lectures Ingeborg Bachmann gave in Frankfurt in 1959–1960, which I read in an Italian translation by Vanda Perretta published by Adelphi as *Letteratura come utopia* (“Literature as Utopia”). Bachmann was militant and vocal against any form of fascism: not only the historical, but the types of fascism at home, in human relationships, and in the formal diktats of a discipline. And in the lectures she is uncomfortable with defining literature, placing her emphasis instead on poetics, and on a porous

form of literature articulated in the *doing* of writing as a tension rather than an accomplished form—reflecting, although not explicitly, her own shift from acclaimed poetry to the untidy troubled prose of *Malina* and the constellation of frayed stories around it. For Bachmann, the only possible language against neat, perfect, closed formulations is “ugly language,” which allows writing to continue being in spite of its incompleteness. I take Bachmann’s ugly language to formulate literature-for-research as transmission and convulsion: an operation on words, an arrangement of systems of attuning and amplification, beyond polishing forms. This ugliness—and crucially, the discomfort in which it resides—lies in the doing and in the excess of writing, rather than being limited to what is read on paper. It has to do with its inflections and snags, with whom it encounters, how it sounds, where it is written from, what through and with—a necessary other in whichever form they might take: be it a dependable circle of readers, a specialist audience, an imaginary conference with the dead, or a broadcast across the ages. Research is in the attention, hours, and thoughts, imprinted on words as malleable, conductive materials to manipulate and arrange: not for closed and protected disciplines, but for undisciplined writing in motion. “What matters is to continue writing,”⁴ and, “Our enthusiasm for certain wonderful texts is, in fact, our desire for the blank, unwritten page.”⁵

Literature eludes any definition of research while embedding it in the viscosity of language as material. It is a movement which does not know its direction. It is a ghost, Bachmann (who wrote radio plays, and so did Jelinek) says in her lecture, her words channelling, in turn, those of Ernst Robert Curtius. It tends towards something other than itself, and it will never be perfection, rather, the embodiment of a “dream of expression which will never be fulfilled”⁶ and which is manifested, articulated, and complicated through ugly language. “We need to work hard with the ugly language which we inherited, to get to that language which has never ruled but which nonetheless rules our intuition and which we imitate . . . and never fully grasp.”⁷

And there is ground to this uncomfortable being-writing, and a necessity to articulate it as such. For Bachmann literature is the glue between words and all that exceeds them, which allows what has already been shaped from within language to partake in what has not yet been told. “Our enthusiasm for certain wonderful texts is, in fact, the enthusiasm for the blank, as yet unwritten page, at which our future goals seem to be aimed.”⁸ Crucially, she mentions

the impact of a thought that initially does not concern itself with any direction, which aims for knowledge and wants to construct knowledge with and through language. It is not about quality as such: it is about the

awareness that you are in a trajectory, for life and death, which denies any casual word . . . The necessity of that pull and the ensuing direction is what matters. A unique and unrepeatable universe of words. There is no other choice.⁹

There is no other choice.

[6]

I had in mind Oliver Sacks, or: the transformation of neurological case studies into literature, utmost example of research as a material engagement with language.¹⁰

[7]

The 'theory' question.

From a faculty meeting a few years ago:

- 'And you could sign a new contract as a theory professor and supervise students' writing.'
- 'But I'm not a theorist: I'm a writer.'

I'm a writer, and I supervise students' writing in a university art department. I'd like to linger on this shift, from a model in which the theory professor is in charge of writing supervision in art schools, to a writer doing so—the shift in expectations, demands, models, procedures.

The acquired notion I encountered at this meeting, that teaching writing at an art school is possible only through theory, or if appended to a theory post, is not an insular issue, but a broader structural one. It touches on the way writing is perceived within the institution, and in turn by students. Too often writing is not seen as a complex work of doing and undoing, that engages with language as material and embodies many varied traffics with art-making, but simply as the host of some 'meaning' that clarifies and explains the work—as if the students' MA texts could miraculously emerge out of a series of abstract discussions and outlines. And too often in this context, the question of research in relation to writing is posed with regards to 'plans,' 'theories,' 'outcomes,' 'impact,' all generating misleading demands. Literature, by contrast, opens to 'groundlessness not without ground': it is a procedure that offers models and teaches *how* not what: not topics, but ways of tuning in, framing, assembling. Literature is not a *fait accompli*.

The above does not mean that theory does not engage with language—but to state that there is not one privileged space, or context, or genre, or form where thinking happens: not exclusively in a seminar, not in the studio, not in theory texts.¹¹ But in the doing of writing. Writing and reading, as forms of material engagement with language, require exposure to a range of models as wide as possible across cultures, genres and gender, canons and further out. This is not to say that writing is not invested in theories. But my work with the students is mostly concerned with how to shape a *modus operandi* in and out of a text. Neither is this solely about craft, but calls for constellations, contexts, references; and desires, models, access. The writing does not just happen as the spontaneous outpour of an art practice, or as a consequence of abstract plans. It has to do with what Jacques Rancière called “the long path of the dissimilar”¹²—with what can only be encountered or set in motion through actual writing, not beforehand; through writing as action and as thinking with language; but also through reading as hosting writing; and through editing.

Following on from Bachmann, writing does not “happen,” it is not “in the air.” It takes shape in doing, and in milieus, that need to be at once found and set up: where do we harvest our words?

Which models are brought forward, which bibliographies, discographies, filmographies, exhibition histories, cultural frameworks are outlined in the context of a writing as research made and attended through language?

It’s not about ‘using your own words,’ but tuning in words, we inhabit and resonate and echo with, or exist in dissonance with, and take responsibility for: ‘Language is never innocent.’¹³

[8]

See [7], and all that happens in the process by means of [9] to [17].

[9]

See [3].

[10]

A turning (tuning) moment in my understanding of writing and language as excess: watching Clarice Lispector’s last interview, watching her sigh between words.¹⁴ The realisation that writing after Clarice could only begin for me in

that gap, with that sigh, in that suspension: a presence beyond words, that punctuates them and inhales them. Nothing much could be said about it, but its fullness resounds and contains, porous, the pacing of intermissions, the breaking out of breath, on and off the page. It deforms and informs words in more words, not quite all hers, not quite all mine: writing is a gesture of friction, an act of small variance. It carves a space not ordered but heard: the space of a prolonged echo, like the sibilant hesitant echo at the end of 'Clarice's' if I try to pronounce it: can you hear it? Can you say it, 'Clarice's,' and perceive the friction in the simultaneous timing of echo? This is where writing as research begins: not to explain with definitions and limits, but to amplify, echo, transmit. Between the 's' of 'Clarice's' and the 's' that runs across 'silence'—silence that holds excess in a transmission made of discrete instants and persistent through time. Writing is echoing, almost nothing, almost—so language and being, literature and research: "So writing is the method of using the word as bait: the word fishing for whatever is not word. When this non-word—between the lines—takes the bait, something has been written."

[11]

In times when writing seems lost, going back to Bhanu Kapil's words allows words to get even more lost, then rebegin:

"I wanted to write a book that was like lying down.

That took some time to write, that kept forgetting something, that took a diversion: from which it never returned."¹⁵

"To speak from my organs in a fiction without end . . . Wrote: a sound or act that 'serves to halt, even as it exposes, the ceaseless dispersal of the text.'"¹⁶

Because she writes that she had to eat charcoal instead of writing. Because there is writing that is body that is material that is air that is race riot that is tension that is a periphery that demands and undoes and forms a cadence, a syntax. And you never entirely hold it.

[12]

Pizarnik, see [3].

[13]

The enhanced attention to form when writing in a second or third language highlights the awareness of operating within language as material—of writing

as artifice, of identity attuned through words. This has got nothing to do with the recurring cliché around writing to ‘find your own voice’: on the contrary, it prompts writing as tuning into many voices and considers how to allow more than one voice to coexist, which resonant frequencies to linger on, which types of dissonance to employ. Crucially, it has to do with listening and waiting, rather than constantly producing. Finding a sentence, making a note, arranging a rhythm on a page are instruments of research into writing which embraces incidents and interruptions. Consider Samuel Beckett, switching languages following a desire to impoverish his words: literature does not always have to coincide with plentiful productivity. It also demands stillness, erosion, and erasure, and all that is left in these procedures: or, what Craig Dworkin called “the inescapable residuum of recalcitrant physical matter left behind when certain inscriptions do not occur as expected.”¹⁷

[14]

On the grounds of my work across a variety of formats and contexts, and writing in English as another language, I have developed an approach to teaching shaped from within an understanding of language as material and a commitment to editing, listening, and close reading, along with rigorous work on referencing systems and contextual study appropriate to each student’s research area. In my work, writing often drifts towards other forms and becomes a speculative prompt towards what is not there: likewise, my teaching is articulated in the tension between the presence of words and what eludes them through other mediums. Research as writing by artists exists in this tension.

A Fine Art MA is not a Creative Writing or Critical Writing MA: the range of questions, desires, doubts, ambitions, and demands each art student holds for writing is wide, as is the way their research is shaped into words. Some of them are not comfortable with language as a medium, others have established forms of writing with different aims than those of the MA text, others question the function of writing or struggle with English as a second language, and others are keen readers yet have difficulty finding a shape to channel their research material.

Developing the MA text asks the students to place their research and work within a constellation of references that they must own, read in detail, arrange, and present. This can only happen when it is clear from the outset that they are to establish their writing *as artists*: such positioning is key in the development of their MA text. I support them by discussing writing as conversation and transmission rather than an outpour of explanations, by encouraging them to

find a form which is never only ‘on paper’ but exists in the vicinity of their artmaking. The fact that each student can choose the form in which they wish to articulate their words is crucial. This form is not arbitrary: it demands that they set up a rigorous position from which they write, through sustained engagement with a textual practice and commitment to independent research in proximity to their final exhibition project. The text is not expected to be a display of knowledge: the question is *how* knowledge is transmitted and made through writing, how to hand over an array of research material in a way that is consistent and focused, in a form—best perhaps to call it a rhythmic arrangement—that is complex and precise, and that holds together.

Some key points in my teaching:

- Research, systems of references, literature review, and contextual analysis: these are effective springboards for students to begin and articulate a text that embeds at once a material engagement with language and critical/contextual understanding, through independent research and evaluation of how to compile and work through bibliographies, discographies, filmographies, exhibition histories.
- Reading groups: writing is generated from reading, and in these groups, we read together and study examples drawn from experimental prose, poetry, conceptual writing, and writing by artists. In parallel, we discuss how artists can work through, echo, and transform the substance of a studio practice into language. Exposure to a wide range of writing styles is vital in opening up possibilities. We also analyse and highlight different purposes and demands, speeds and modes of production of writing; differentiating, for example, between the purposes of writing for performance, of writing notebooks as the chronicle of a practice, and of the MA text.
- Writing workshops: writing is generated from writing, as the students work with the materiality of text. So far my workshops have focused on constraints, residues, instructions, ‘writing through,’ listening, stuttering, rewriting, rhetoric devices, imaginary conversations: aiming to enable students to articulate and challenge their respective approaches to writing.
- Editorial work: I work with students in an editorial capacity through draft revisions and written comments ranging from structural to line edits, allowing them to establish a consistent style and approach. Their research question is sharpened from within the writing process, as they gradually understand that the MA text is a site of complexities which they can employ at large to find and offer yet another point of access to their practice.
- Necessary form and independent research: I work with students so that they can develop a form of writing for which there is no alternative. Its very specific form is born out of a rigorous and sustained engagement with their

practice. It could not be done other than that way. This condition of ‘no alternative’ is *not* related to the idea of ‘finding your voice,’ too connected to notions of authenticity [13]—rather, it’s a case of hearing the complex interplay of frequencies and intermissions within a research project, and what a student chooses to tune in for that specific project. Literature in this sense is presented as a transmission of material, rather than the production of singular, isolated, authorial gestures: not as an individual endeavour, but a collective one that cuts through time, tunes in a range of materials, searches for or establishes milieus.

- For those students whose first language is not English, the awareness of language as artifice and their sense of being strangers in a language are important tools to generate types of writing grounded on their systems, addressing insecurities by transforming perceived shortcomings into distinctive elements. Specific work on the heightened attention to form that exists when operating in a second language allows them to realise that writing is a signifying practice to be shaped from within the very making of it.

[15]

Three key terms that contribute to my teaching, and to speculative approaches to literature and research:

Poetry: “I should have written poetics.” See [4] and [6].

Ultratranslation: defined by Antena as “messy, excessive unruly,” ultratranslation is a way of being with words which takes the untranslatable as starting point, considering “the instigatory space of difficulty and not understanding.”¹⁸ It is an effective conceptual tool for moving a visual art practice into words, for beginning to articulate positions of difficulty; to dwell in those positions and allow writing to be born there.

Trancelation: I call the approach to the uneasy forms of writing across languages and cultures ‘trancelation’. It merges trance and transport, it is a state of otherness in motion. It does not seal a text as fixed, approved, legitimate. It transmits despatches from another language or medium and allows it to disturb yet another language or medium. I’m interested in the type of signal that can be broadcast in these flows and transits, through words made present and heard. And in how someone else might pick that signal up and amplify it further. A frequency might meet another and resonate. Misunderstandings, dead ends, and noise reshape the transmission. To interfere with language with languages—where ‘research’ into literature is not always equal to ‘meaning,’

but questions meanings through rhythms, pauses, breaths, sounds. It does not take the form of a sequence of propositions: it shapes itself through rhythms and inflexions and turns of phrases and words. This is why it demands to be sustained. This is why I go back to it. This writing: uncomfortable and unstable; not in translation but 'trancelated' through the material engagement that Jelinek called "what always had to remain unclear and groundless."

[16]

Writing is never only words on paper but all that puts pressure on it nonetheless, that stays unwritten and yet moulds it, its rhythms and tensions; points at bodies, networks, transits, accidents. It makes language impure, not fixed; interferes with what is proper and legitimate; embraces stuttering or language at the level of non-speaking that startles, silences, destabilises. The restless movements of a foreignness from the inside.

[17]

Working with listening I have developed some reflections around writing and the ephemeral, which in turn inform many conversations with students around the question of the ineffable in art, and how to begin to articulate words nonetheless. Listening: trespassing. Not being confined to a disciplinary reading that clips down—not concerned with the 'about,' listening is verb and method,¹⁹ and does not exclusively pertain to music and sound.²⁰ In the past I have listened to a page, or to a painting: beyond disciplines, groundless in the eyes of given contexts, approaches, references, but not without ground in the writing that holds disparate elements together.

Even at its most implicit, listening has to do with presence—both active and not. It is tied to how knowledge is transmitted, to form another type of knowledge, less depending on hierarchies and quotes, focused on what is passed on, its cadence, its sense before it means. Consider what happened with Clarice [10]: listening to her sigh allowed me to frequent her words more intensely, to hear their pauses with a purposive ear while being distracted from writing. By playing around them in stillness, by staring at them and repeating them, by writing through listening, the "s" of 'Clarice's' possessive was lifted off the page, possessed my words, and prompted more words: listening in writing as research as literature as transmission.

Endnotes

- 1 Elfriede Jelinek, "Sidelined," 2004, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2004/jelinek-lecture-html, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.
- 2 Nicoletta Tiliacos, "Fleur dentro un arazzo," in: *Il Foglio*, 27 Oct. 2014, <http://www.ilfoglio.it/articoli/2014/10/27/news/fleur-dentro-un-arazzo-77872/>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018. (Translation: Daniela Cascella.)
- 3 Alejandra Pizarnik, *Extracting the Stone of Madness: Poems 1962–1972*, translated by Yvette Siegert. New York, NY: New Directions, 2016, p. 117.
- 4 Ingeborg Bachmann, *Letteratura come utopia* (1980), translated by Vanda Perretta. Milano: Adelphi, 2011, p. 123. (English translation from the Italian: Daniela Cascella. For the German original, cf. *Probleme zeitgenössischer Dichtung. Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. Munich: Piper, 1980.)
- 5 Bachmann (2011), *Letteratura come utopia*, p. 109.
- 6 Bachmann (2011), *Letteratura come utopia*, p. 120.
- 7 Bachmann (2011), *Letteratura come utopia*, p. 123.
- 8 Bachmann (2011), *Letteratura come utopia*, p. 109.
- 9 Bachmann (2011), *Letteratura come utopia*, p. 25.
- 10 See also Corina Caduff's consideration around what is articulated 'non-artistically' in "Literature and Artistic Research," in: Corina Caduff et al., eds., *Art and Artistic Research*, Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010, pp. 98–105.
- 11 I discussed these concerns in more depth in a public conversation with Kate Briggs at the Society for Artistic Research's 2016 annual conference on Writing in The Hague.
- 12 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, translated by Kristin Ross. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 67.
- 13 Louis Armand, "Language is Never Innocent," 4 June 2017, <https://equuspress.wordpress.com/2017/06/06/language-is-never-innocent/>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.
- 14 Clarice Lispector, "Interview," 1977, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1wzGLBpULs>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.
- 15 Bhanu Kapil, *Ban en Banlieue*. New York, NY: Nightboat Books, 2015, p. 42.
- 16 Kapil (2015), *Ban en Banlieue*, p. 52.
- 17 Craig Dworkin, *No Medium*. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 2015, p. 9.
- 18 Antena, *A Manifesto for Ultratranslation*. Houston, TX: Blaffer Museum and Antena Books, 2013, p. 7.
- 19 Salomé Voegelín, *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*, New York, NY, London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- 20 David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener*, New York, NY, London: Continuum, 2010.

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Writing Sonic Fictions: Literature as a Portal into the Possibility of Art Research

Salomé Voegelin

Abstract:

This text writes a short deliberation on the potential of literary writing and literary study to establish the possible worlds of fiction as an exploratory sphere within which we can tease, from the ambiguity of art, its contribution to research and knowledge without suppressing the sensorial and aesthetic dimension of its material. The literary is presented as a modest collaborator to the artistic investigation: aiding its articulation without erasing its processes and speechlessness. This *approchement* of work and text is critiqued and augmented through the radical reality of sound and the notion of sonic fictions that breach analytical language to speak its excess.

Introduction

One of the most powerful moments in Philippe Parreno's installation *Anywhen*, a multi-media, multi-thing and arguably multi-time and multi-space work shown in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern between October 2016 and April 2017, is a video of ventriloquist Nina Conti with her dummy standing mute in a huge, floodlit but empty auditorium, listening to a recording of her own as well as her ventriloquised voice. Her eyes stare awkwardly into the bright light, the dummy looks prostrate, deflated, and at the same time, there is a sense of anticipation: some sort of reveal has to happen, an explanation is expected from the darkness behind the bright spots of light that frame them both as a mute spectacle.

Who is ventriloquising the ventriloquist?

This text provides a short reflection on how to articulate the knowledge of art without speaking for it. It engages in the emerging discourse and practice of art research in relation to the possibility of literature, repositioned through the notion of sonic fictions. Thus it measures literary writing and elements of literary study in relation to the current endeavour of establishing art research as a legitimate agent in the production of knowledge and evaluates its potential through the radical reality of sound. The focus on sound and a sonic literacy

introduces a sensibility for the invisible, for what comes out of the dark and is without a source or a name, and includes doubt in visual, systematic definitions, in favour of calling things contingently what they might be for now.

In the process of making this association between literature, sound, and art, other things come in to play. Inevitably the focus on art and knowledge turns an essay on methodological ideas towards the principle of the project itself, and confronts the objective of articulating art's sense by contemplating disciplinary investments, histories, and ideologies.

In the background of the question about who, what discipline, 'throws' its voice onto the stage to make the artistic dummy speak, rests the pervasiveness of a taxonomical consciousness and lexical norms of thinking post-Kant, which at once enable but also demand quantification and consensus. But the query as to the articulation of art's knowledge is impelled also by the radical jouissance of another voice that sounds for example in Julia Kristeva's poetic language that does not stop for signification but performs the "endless mobility" of the text, imploding the stability of signification and putting words and meanings on trial;¹ and that resounds in Hélène Cixous's "indispensable ruptures and transformations" that unravel what it is possible to write and what it is possible to mean.² Their mobile rupturing of the infrastructure of epistemological thinking leads to a debate on the (mis-)conception that words and letters provide meaning that is more stable and systematic than that of any other expression; and informs a discussion, directed via the fictions of a conceptual sound, on the potential of literary fictions to tease from the work its own thinking, while being aware that maybe art cannot write at all.

The Speechlessness of Art

If thinking is a project of intelligible words, then art is the unthinkable. Not because it might not use words but because the words it uses almost immediately cease to comply with semantic meaning and instead drag communication into the opacity of the material: its sounds, its breath, its graphic image, rather than what it meant to say.

According to Howard Caygill, a Kantian philosophy of language still today, totally and almost imperceptibly so, pervades our conception of language as a

1 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), translated by Margaret Waller. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 102.

2 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in: Elaine Marks/Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981, pp. 245–264; here p. 250.

lexical resource. It represents the cornerstone of Western thought, decisively influencing the organisation and possibility of our thinking, speaking, and writing in quantifiable epistemologies of meaning and reference. Although, according to Caygill, Kant's views on language were more open-ended and discursive than some would come to interpret and use them, or indeed criticise them for, what is relevant here is that its analogical definitions lend a hand to structures, networks, taxonomies, and lexicons and thus set the parameters of the possibility of knowledge, identity, and thought, and delineate as unthinkable and impossible that which falls outside of it.³

The pervasiveness of Kant's conception of language means that it is not only within the remit of philosophy but across the broader cultural consciousness, its sense of signification and truth, that a Kantian language frame influences the definition of the real and thus delimits the scope and articulation of knowledge. Kant's conception of language as an analytical device enables taxonomies of abstract knowledge and creates structures about what things are and how the world is. They grant legitimacy, enable consensus and communication, but at the same time they exclude, without acknowledging this exclusion, that which falls outside the remit of its organisational framework: the opaque, sensate materiality, the invisible and the inaudible, whose appearance has no letters to form a definition and whose shape cannot be recognised in words. Kant's language calls subjects and objects within an etymological and symbolic frame that grants their image a visible form, but hides what else they might be, and ignores what else there might be. It speaks for them but not with their voice, and leaves speechless that which cannot be known within its frame.

This speechlessness is the fate of Nina Conti and her ventriloquist dummy. Their voices were stolen by the interpretative act of audio-visual montage; they stand and stare as their words are played back at them from behind bright lights and without their say-so. The absurdity of playing, out of synch and disconnected, two voices that for their communication and intelligibility rely on the invisible synchronicity and connection of ventriloquy, is an allegory for the confusion and ethical dilemma of the voice about art research. It points to what Jessica Worden, in her text "Articulating Breath: Writing Charcot's Hysteric with *Performance Writing*"⁴ calls "the site of failure," where "the thing is fixed,

3 Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, pp. 1–7.

4 Worden refers her interpretation of *performance writing* to Ric Allsopp who articulates it as an investigation of the performance of writing; and practises it in accordance with Caroline Bergvall as a spatial and active juxtapositions of source material "incorporating every aspect of the writing making process as part of the work." (Jessica Worden, "Articulating Breath: Writing Charcot's Hysteric with *Performance Writing*," in: *New Voices Forum, Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 3:3 (2014), pp. 318–325; here p. 319.)

in a word . . . I think you're trying to worm it out of me," where, in other words, interpretation is revealed as manipulation, as "a speaking for."⁵ Worden discusses Jean-Martin Charcot's writing on behalf of the hysteric who is defined by her inarticulacy. While I want to avoid the equation of the artist as hysteric, Worden's observations, which motivate and inform her approach, foreground implicit ethical concerns of an ill-conceived custodianship of another person or another discipline. The medical voice deforms the experience of the patient through the expectation of its vocabulary and disciplinary objective. Documenting her illness, Charcot obliterates the hysteric's voice, excluding her body from the authority of the text. Performing these texts, as Worden does, she brings the body back into play and the authorial text into conversation with other texts and other visual material, diluting its singularity. However, despite the performative rendition, and the plurality of voices, the inarticulate voice of the hysteric remains absent, its sense translated, bridged rather than expressed in the montage of materials and documents. The plurality of sources and media used in *performance writing* provides multiple perspectives, and the performative reading grants the text temporality and contingent references, but the disciplinary context, its expectation, and analytical framework, nevertheless are in conflict with the possibility of inarticulation, which remains unheard.

The academic custodianship of artistic research leads to what Henk Borgdorff calls "border-violations" that according to him "spark a good deal of tension" (between art and academia) and that I understand to resemble the violations of the patient being made to speak the language of the medical discipline, rather than that of its own body.⁶ "She does not make a sound. No air, no breath, no noise. How do you write an inarticulate state like this?"⁷ For Worden writing is crucial in giving the inarticulate a voice, but she also acknowledges that failure is inevitable "because of the resistance on the part of the subject."⁸ The artistic subject, too, resists language. Its body is in process, on trial, it does not signify but means through modes of thinking and doing. For art to contribute its knowledge equitably to the table of research, the ambiguous, unreliable, and incomplete of this process must be made accessible, rather than be explained or translated in a metalanguage with its own interests in the stakes of knowledge.

5 Worden (2014), *Articulating Breath*, p. 324.

6 Henk Borgdorff, "The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research," in: Michael Biggs/Henrik Karlsson, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*. London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 44–63: here p. 44.

7 Worden (2014), *Articulating Breath*, p. 320.

8 Worden (2014), *Articulating Breath*, p. 324.

These reflections inform my view that academic scholarship should not colonialise and take over the body of art in order to speak for it in its disciplinary erudition, but to let the work, inarticulate as it might seem, establish its own voice and sense of things. So it might cease to be articulated as a failure of articulation, as what cannot be known, but comes to be understood and valued as the future of knowledge that informs and creates a language and an articulation that stretches beyond the lexicon, into the unthinkable and the unimaginable, which we might have to make use of to solve those problems that we do not have answers for and those that we do not yet know.

Literature as a Modest Collaborator

Towards the end of his essay “The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research,” Borgdorff engages in questions of “appropriateness” of documentation for art research, to do it justice and to report accurately on its findings. While he includes the possibility of non-verbal forms of outcomes, he still values language as an important tool in the evaluation process. But rather than staging it as an interpretative voice he calls it a complimentary medium “to help get across to others what is at issue in the research—provided one keeps in mind that there will always be a gap between what is displayed and what is put into words.”⁹ He does not seek to bridge this gap, as Worden does, but wants it acknowledged as the condition of the articulation of artistic knowledge exactly. Thus language does not make art speak but compliments its expression and as Borgdorff suggests “a certain modesty is due here in view of the performative power of material outcomes.”¹⁰

As such a ‘modest collaborator’ literature and the poetic can circumvent the abstraction of interpretative mechanisms which ventriloquise. They can do so by putting language on trial: by writing in signifiers that keep on signifying but never really “mean.”¹¹ Or they can take from the oral tradition the power of the performative to structure a different imaginary: unperforming conventional identities and the values of a ruling voice¹² and “sweeping away syntax,

9 Borgdorff (2012), *Production of Knowledge*, p. 58.

10 Ibid.

11 Kristeva (1984), *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 104 outlines a signifying practice of the “text,” where “the commotion the practice creates spares nothing: it destroys all constancy to produce another then destroys that one as well.”

12 Cf. Hélène Cixous/Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), translated by Betsy Wing. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996, p. 6.

breaking that famous thread” by articulating the excess of language and what remains unsaid.¹³

This linguistic excess—this writing without grammar and the unperformance of the language base—critiques the capacity and prejudice of analytic language, the norms it represents and fosters, and generates instead expressions that might be able to account for the invisible and the inaudible and that might write a language in which art can speak itself as knowledge. The excess of writing without syntax, understood as the grammatical and disciplinary structure of words and their aim, is embraced also by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi in their book *Thought in Act* (2014). In its introduction, Manning and Massumi identify philosophy’s outside as a “generative environment” that offers itself to think collaboratively the act of doing the impossible.¹⁴ Whereby the impossible in this context is not really what does not or cannot exist, but what we do not yet know, giving the collaboration a generative and future capacity rather than an interpretative role. Their close focus on work, on movements and expressions of the body and speech rather than language, attaches a positive and curious energy to the excessive. Accordingly, language articulates not as a precarious bridge nor as an inevitable gap but as a deliberate breach “in the fragile difference between models of thought in the act,” breaching the limits of language to speak its excess.¹⁵ To identify this excess Manning and Massumi recall the break with meaning in teenage speech: “It’s like this. Just like, sad.” This phrase does not pursue designation and definition but voices a more refracted sense on the border of speechlessness, uttering sensation. “It marks an affective overflow in speech.” It is just like sad *is*: it “overfills, its designation,” and opens towards the possibility of a sensorial sense articulating the impossible.¹⁶

This openness towards the possible and the impossible as the sensorial sense of speech finds a parallel in Ruth Ronen’s exploration of the literary text through possible world theory. The modal realism of possible world theory allows literary study to separate the idea of a text as expressing truth in relation to an outside-story from the truth of the object or event within the text. “Truth no longer involves a fixed and absolute standard by which true and false world-versions are judged, and by which fictional worlds are rejected from the realm

13 Cixous (1981), *Laugh of the Medusa*, p. 256.

14 Erin Manning/Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014, p. vii.

15 Ibid.

16 Manning/Massumi (2014), *Thought in the Act*, p. 34.

of the true.”¹⁷ Instead, the concept of truth has been replaced with the notion of “warranted assertibility” within a fictional world, which obeys flexible criteria of validation.¹⁸ Thus a literary text is understood to create a sphere away from the normative ideologies and expectations of analytical language, open to perform different relationships and find a different system of truth generation in a textual universe built on the excess of language, the incomplete, and the unthinkable.

Ronen goes on to suggest that this reassessment of truth has an impact beyond the text: “it enables us to see the actual world not as a given but as a set of propositions indexed by a different operator.”¹⁹ In this interpretation, the literary offers a language not of explanation but of proposition: proposing and generating in excess of existing knowledge the sense of sensation and demonstrating the ideological investment of existing knowledge paths.

Consequently, if literary fictions as textual actual and textual possible worlds can, according to Ronen, de-instrumentalise the relationship between the real and the text, they can also be used to de-instrumentalise and de-systematise the relationship between research, art, and writing. Instead of limiting the scope of intelligibility in relation to actuality and an analytical language, literary possible worlds can open the space for affective knowledge of excess and overflow laying bare the investments and ideologies of the actual and generating an alternative environment that articulates the seemingly impossible. Possibilia can invite us into a textual universe where the references are not analytical, bound to the taxonomy of the known, but fictional, driven by the reality of a future knowledge that is as yet unthinkable.

In this way, literary language can access different truths and generate different knowledge environments. It can use the poetic register of fiction and the fictional register of poetry to create a critical voice, which as a modest collaborator in the effort of ‘documenting’ and articulating art as research might provide the portal to the possibilities of arts’ own terms.

However, for Ronen, possible world theory is interesting and useful for the exploration of fictional texts only as long as they remain autonomous of its philosophical background in logic as well as of the ontology of the actual world. “Possible worlds are based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities that emerge from an actual state of affairs; fictional worlds are based on a logic of parallelism that guarantees their autonomy

17 Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 41.

18 Ibid.

19 Ronen (1994), *Possible Worlds*, p. 39.

in relation to the actual world.”²⁰ For Ronen, the textual universe remains removed from actuality. Literary fictions are parallel fictions: they have no actual impact or consequence on the real world. Therefore, while literature opens thinking to the (im-)possible, it lacks the legitimacy to impact on our knowledge base.

The issue here lies in the differentiation between the mere possibility of fiction and the perceived actuality of the real. This difference represents a gap that cannot be bridged but needs to be breached: fiction needs to be explored not as a proposition but as an action, which generates the real from unthinkable movements and invisible thoughts. I suggest that such a ‘real fiction’ is found in the invisible mobility of sound and a participatory listening that does not hear a source but generates its possibility from the ephemeral of sound itself. Thus I turn to Kodwo Eshun’s *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, where the ear “lingers lovingly inside a single remix, explores the psychoacoustic fictional spaces of interludes and intros, goes to extremes to extrude the illogic other studies flee. It happily deletes familiar names . . . and historical precedence.”²¹ Eshun’s writing is an explicit attempt, in content and form, to critique, subvert, and expand how music is written about. It ridicules and effaces the conventions of music journalism and proposes a language that comes from sound, from its rhythm, from a bodily cerebrality that hears a techno future rather than follows the trajectories of the past into the present. This allows him to abandon the taxonomies and categories of history and its language, and in its stead, he produces dense narrations from sounds and rhythms that bring unprecedented valuations, demand neologisms, and trigger a physical engagement. While Eshun’s sonic fictions are science-fictions for a musical production and thus only have an indirect relation to art research, they compellingly use the invisible mobility of sound and its untetheredness from the objective and a chronological line of thought to propose alternative paths to knowledge that are useful to reimagine the knowledge of art.

The use of possible world theory in relation to sound, just as for literature, is untied from its philosophical background, using rather than obeying conventions of logic, negotiating and subverting at times even its methods through the sensibility of the mobile and the invisible. However, unlike literary fictions, sonic fictions are not necessarily separate from the actual world. They are so only when considered visually: when their material is negotiated as a ‘shadow’ of a visual source, dependent for their meaning on correspondence and a textual referent. When listened to unseen, however, they sound in the actual world its possibilities. As an invisible thing sound does not propose but

20 Ronen (1994), *Possible Worlds*, p. 8.

21 Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. London: Quartet Books, 1998, p. 4.

generates the heard, whose fictionality is thus not parallel but equivalent: it is the sonic thing that I hear. In this way, sound produces a possible actual fiction rather than a possible parallel fiction and sounds as “world-creating predicate” the generative environment of its own truth that articulates in excess of the semantic.²² While this position is achieved through an engagement with sonic materiality, sound also functions as concept and as sensibility and becomes a conduit, a portal into the appreciation of the invisible and the mobile dimension of the world, whatever material the art researcher is working with.

As concept and as sensibility of the ephemeral, sound triggers and informs a fiction that articulates the real unknown, the unthinkable, and the incomplete, without marginalising it in a parallel textual universe, by instead comprehending the actuality of invisible possibilities and offering a portal to access them. We share this portal tentatively in a writing that does not obey the rationale of analytical language, its prejudices and expectations, but engages the capacity of sound to write the unheard. This is a language that sounds the laughter of feminine writing, as described by Cixous in her 1976 text *The Laugh of the Medusa*. It is a seemingly “impregnable” language “that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes” and becomes accessible only “in the act” of reading as an involved inhabiting²³: moving, doing, reading; to make it bare its consequences on the disciplinary framework it is challenging by necessity of its opaque inarticulacy.

Sonic fictions do not propose a bridge between the actual and the possible but make the possibility of actuality apparent, building reality in the contingent and rickety shape of its formless form. Thus, art research as sonic fiction is a generative fiction, rather than a referential fiction. It is designed from the actions of its materiality, not as description or reference of an object as source, but as the invisible shape of the process itself. We inhabit this ephemeral materiality intersubjectively, reciprocating its agency in the sensory-motor action of a ‘listening reading’ as a movement toward the text. In this way, we gain access to the invisible process of the work and come to an articulation that is not invested in nouns but in the predicate, in the doing and the mobility of research.

Conclusion

Maybe rather than agonising over a legitimate and reproducible and thus reliable language for art research, where comparisons can take place, consensus

22 Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 22.

23 Cixous (1981), *Laugh of the Medusa*, p. 256.

achieved and the outcome repeated, we have to acknowledge that art's knowledge is practical, contingent and fleeting, potentially unrepeatable. The performance of its expression, therefore, constitutes an overflow and a non-designation that confronts us not only with the possibility of artistic sense but also with the limits of analytic language and academic knowledge. Thus while I write in favour of an engagement with art as research that borrows from the literary and the possibility of fiction—not to destroy artistic and aesthetic knowledge, its ambiguity, incompleteness, and, at times, sheer absence, but to foster the unreliable and unfinishable aspects of its production through literature's capacity to be ambiguous and incomplete—I am weary of a disciplinary takeover. Literature cannot speak for art. It can lend it tools and become a modest collaborator maybe, but as soon as it speaks in its stead it obstructs the knowledge pathway art burrows for itself in the unthinkable processes of its production, and that it presents unseen on the surface of its sensorial self. Only from the invisible and unexpected aspects of artistic production and with a sonic sensibility, a language can be derived that takes account of arts' own invisible sense.

There is a politics and an ethics in the refusal of art research to fill the taxonomic frame of a Kantian consciousness, whose knowledge enables but also demands and necessitates a categorical understanding of the world that relies on rather than critiques the prejudices of its base. The lexical definitions of gender, race, class, form, materiality, etc. describe normative identities whose certainty cannot be challenged with the language that categorises them so. Therefore while such categorical understanding legitimises and strengthens the notion of abstract knowledge, granting it authority, the socioeconomic asymmetries of its language reveal its construction and the ideologies of its build. By contrast, the unspeakable of art and the plurality of its processes, when speaking in its mother tongue, can question the ideologies of referential definitions and can challenge its exclusions, generating actual possible fictions and as yet impossible authorships.

Because it is not only about what knowledge but also whose knowledge. The heterogeneity of authorship is a central concern of artistic research, circumventing the base of normative sense through the radical nature of a speechless production. Thus, rather than fitting the volatile sense of art into the academic frame, scholarship has to question more rigorously the implication of its subjectivity and authority, and the limitation of its language on what it can find out about the world.

The political possibility of art research lies in its speechlessness as a refusal of normative sense and its ideological investments. It should not be coerced into the shape of a pre-existing language, literary or otherwise. Instead, it

should be given the space and time to critique the conventions of language that determine and confirm the reliable, the consensual and the apparently true, and to activate alternatives that are not ventriloquised or marginalised but 'throw' their own voice.

Thus maybe rather than staring in the headlights and accepting being spoken for, artists as researchers need to sit down with their own tools, their mother tongue, and a dummy of their own to scream and shout, whisper and (in-) articulate the possibility of the incomplete, and enact the possibility of the impossible. Since art research when speaking in its own voice ruptures the rationale of taxonomical language and transforms its definitions. It can do so for example through a technologically aided ventriloquy that does not speak another's words, but pluralises and extends its articulation to amplify its sphere of influence, just like Andrea Pensado live at the Back Alley Theater: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KspVG1Jrhpg>.

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The Knowledge of Literature



Practice-Based Literary Research as Activated Inquiry

Vincent Broqua

Abstract:

Literary artistic practice should analyse and describe its modes and modalities. Based on the study of Caroline Bergvall's and Jena Osman's practice-based research, this article focuses on inquiry as one of the modes of literary research, while also showing the use of introducing poetry within the discourse of literary research. The two works investigated activate their research by the creation of a *poesis* of inquiry. This investigation allows for a renewed consideration of artistic research.

Introduction

In the text of her inaugural lecture to the Chair of Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts at Leiden University, Janneke Wesseling defines artistic research as “the critical and theoretically positioned reflection by the artist on her practice in the world, in artworks, and in the written text.”¹ Whether or not this definition obtains for visual arts, it is both apt and problematic for what one might call literary artistic research or literary research. Since the medium of literature is precisely words and ‘text’ (in the broad sense of the term, be it on- or off-the-page writing), the distinction between non-verbal artworks and written text cannot be applied here. However, Wesseling’s definition gains in precision when she moves on to a second distinction, namely the one between discursive and non-discursive: “The reflection finds expression in the interconnection of artwork and discursive writing.”² What might this entail for literary research, when literary research does not so much come in the form of discursive writing, but in the form of criticism and poetics, which in themselves rely on a “critical and theoretically positioned reflection”³ such as Wesseling demands?

1 Janneke Wesseling, *Of Sponge, Stone and the Intertwinement with the Here and Now: A Methodology of Artistic Research*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016, pp. 9–10.

2 Wesseling (2016), *Of Sponge*, p. 10.

3 *Ibid.*

The texts collected in a volume I co-edited in 2012, *Formes critiques contemporaines*, show that the definitions and modes of practice-based criticism are manifold.⁴ Nevertheless, a general definition of practice-based criticism could entail a critical investigation using some of the modes and methods of research (a given question or topic, a hypothesis, an argument, sometimes a demonstration ...) while broadening the range of the methods and writing-styles of orthodox criticism and literary history. For sure, it is problematic to assume that criticism and academic writing have or should have a fixed and conventional form, as Roland Barthes's articles and books, among others, perfectly demonstrated a long time ago. Yet practice-based criticism further broadens and enriches such forms, as it emerges from practical or creative activities such as translation, editing, documenting, interviewing.⁵

The forms and modalities of literary artistic research are not only to be sought for in the field of criticism, however. In what follows, I want to explore some of the characteristics of practice-based literary research with precise examples taken in the *poetic* anglophone and francophone domains. Poetry is often bracketed out of the discourse around artistic research, assuming that only fiction and narrative are possible candidates for literary research. Since literary research must factor in discursive modes, and since poetry, in some of its forms, goes against speech and discourse, it is often assumed that poetry is ill-suited to reach a satisfying definition of literary research. I will try to show the contrary.

Through my examples, and notably Caroline Bergvall's "Say: Parsley"⁶ and Jena Osman's *Public Figures*,⁷ I will outline some of the defining features of what practice-based literary research might be, and particularly how it *activates* research via *poiesis*. Meanwhile, I will take the opportunity to think about some of the reasons why the common definitions of artistic research, such as Wesseling's, might not fully apply to literary artistic research. If the field, therefore, needs to define itself further, this should be attempted without abiding

4 This was a special issue of *Formes poétiques contemporaines* 9 (2012), Vincent Broqua/Jean-Jacques Poucel, eds. It presented 52 contributions by critics, authors, publishers, and translators who explore new critical modes.

5 Other than the contributions in *Formes poétiques contemporaines* 9 (2012) see also Antoine Berman, *L'épreuve de l'étranger*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1984, for translation as criticism; and for interviews and artistic research see Norman K. Denzin, "The Reflexive Interview and a Performative Social Science," in: *Qualitative Research* 11 (2001), pp. 23–46. Denzin's argument and examples are extremely valuable, although his notion of a "moral community" (p. 24) as well as the periodisation he developed (cf. p. 25) are open to question.

6 Caroline Bergvall, "Say: Parsley," in: *Fig*. Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2005, pp. 49–60.

7 Jena Osman, *Public Figures*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012.

by the rules of reifying political injunctions that make artistic research the new commodity of academic discourse. As Wesseling says:

As we all know, the political pressure on artists and academics to deliver concrete 'results' is enormous. Artists are increasingly expected to create and produce 'deliverables' and to be able to demonstrate the social usefulness and commercial value of their 'products' I believe we should therefore avoid the term 'knowledge production' in relation to artistic research. 'Knowledge production' belongs to a neoliberal jargon, along with terms like innovation, applicability and valorization.⁸

Practice-Based Literary Research as Inquiry

Just like any form of practice-based art, practice-based literary research *investigates*; it is a form of practice-based inquiry. In her book of essays called *The Language of Inquiry*, the US poet Lyn Hejinian argues that "the language of poetry is a language of inquiry, not the language of a genre."⁹ She states that poetics is "a pragmatic realm," since "the reasons and reasonings that motivate poet (and poem) are embedded in the world and in the language with which we bring it into view. The resulting praxis is addressed to phenomenological and epistemological concerns."¹⁰ Defined in such a way it could be assumed that all poetry is criticism and that all poetry is thus a mode of inquiry close to the investigations and experiments fundamental to literary research. However, Hejinian makes two neat distinctions that allow complexifying matters further. First, she demonstrates that the knowledge gained "is not knowledge in the strictest sense; it is, rather, acknowledgement—and that constitutes a sort of unknowing."¹¹ Second, she adds that although poetry is to know that things are, "to know *that* things are is not to know *what* things are."¹²

In developments in contemporary poetry since the publication of her book, many younger poets have sought to connect the *that* and the *what* of poetic practice. Indeed, one of the defining features of our contemporary moment in the visual arts as well as in writing is a resort to the mode and the methods

8 Wesseling (2016), *Of Sponge*, p. 34.

9 Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*. Los Angeles, CA: The University of California Press, 2000, p. 3.

10 Hejinian (2000), *Language*, p. 2.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

of *inquiry*. And although the artists and writers working in such ways may not refer to practice-based research and even less so to artistic research, their work qualifies as artistic research and is even *positioned* as research. In the field of visual arts, Laura Poitras's *Astro Noise* in 2016 at the Whitney or Kader Attia's installation *Réfléchir la mémoire* at the Centre Pompidou for the Marcel Duchamp Prize (2016) come to mind.¹³ To name a few poets, Franck Leibovici's recent *Bogoro* (2016, with Julien Seroussi) is a conceptual exploration of one of the trials of the International Court of Justice,¹⁴ while Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (2014) explores racial prejudices in the United States of America.¹⁵ Jennifer Scappertone's project "The Data that We Breathe," developed in 2016 with Caroline Bergvall and Judd Morrissey at the Richard and Mary L. Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry, was accompanied by a course on the poetics and politics of air.¹⁶ My book *Récupérer* (2015)¹⁷ has a section called "enquêtes" (inquiries) and is about inquiries in the uncharted field of *the diverse* or miscellaneousness, with Marcel Mauss's essay on the techniques of the body as a starting point and a foil.¹⁸ Such practices can be serious and funny, and they can even come with a slightly absurd twist, as in the case of Lisa Robertson. A serious researcher (see her book on architecture¹⁹) as well as a poet, the Canadian poet recently published her experiments and research on how the world is viewed through pink glasses. This was an attempt at questioning what it means to write the experience of the world by submitting it to trials and errors but also, fundamentally, to see how this endeavour is informed by language itself.²⁰

Of course, resorting to inquiry in writing is not entirely new. One needs only turn to Susan Howe's fabulous poetic experiments in history or to Jerome Rothenberg's collections of folkloric songs and poems to realise the importance of *inquiry* in the structuration of US poetry²¹. However, one cannot but

13 While Laura Poitras installed films, documentation, and archives about mass surveillance and war as part of her project to document post 9/11 America, Attia relied on film interviews he had conducted about phantom limbs.

14 Franck Leibovici/Julien Seroussi, *Bogoro*. Paris: Questions Théoriques, 2016.

15 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014.

16 See <https://graycenter.uchicago.edu/fellowships/the-data-that-we-breathe>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

17 Vincent Broqua, *Récupérer*. Paris: Les Petits Matins, 2015.

18 Marcel Mauss, "Les techniques du corps" (1936), in: *Sociologie et anthropologie*. Paris: PUF, 1950, pp. 365–386.

19 Lisa Robertson, *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture*. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2003.

20 Lisa Robertson, "Rose," in: *Three Summers*. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2016, pp. 112–116.

21 For instance, Susan Howe's recent *Souls of the Labadie Tract* and *That this* are poetic investigations derived from the history of historical figures and their material relation with

notice a strong resurgence in the interest for and the practice of inquiry and investigation as a continuation of the experimental project of the 1950s, now with a *subject-matter*. All of the examples given are not experiments for experiment's sake (if the historical experimenters did that). They are experiments with a twist or with an almost scientific method. And, as we will see with Bergvall's "Say: Parsley" and Osman's *Public Figures*, the current poetic intervention in the field of research is decidedly one of creating an experience of the experience, and an *activation* of language.

Bergvall's Investigations into the *What* and the *That* of Language

In "Say: Parsley," Caroline Bergvall investigates the excluding mechanisms of language. How does language skills kill, how are slips of the tongue or puns more than just poetic games? Moreover, how is the experiment with language more than just an aesthetic endeavour? "Say: Parsley" was an installation sited in several different places along the years.²² Based on the notion of the shibboleth, the piece was an inquiry in the socially marked pronunciations. It reflected on the fact that because of the mispronunciation of the word *perejil*, 'parsley' in Spanish, the Creole Haitians were massacred by the Dominicans in 1937. This, as often with Bergvall's bodily as well as research-based writing,²³ prompted many modes of poetic research from poem to performance to audio-piece. Indeed, her research relied on and gave rise to sound performance, on gestures, on written words on the walls, and on social engagement, particularly through the pronunciation of the letter 'r'²⁴ in English:

In the culturally pluralistic, yet divided, and markedly monolingual society of contemporary Britain, variations in accent and deviations from a broad English pronunciation still frequently entail degrees of

textuality. Jerome Rothenberg's landmark anthology *Shaking the Pumpkin* is a collection of transcriptions of 'traditional poetry of the Indian North Americas.'

22 For photographs of the installation at the Spacex Gallery and at the Arnolfini Gallery, see <http://carolinebergvall.com/work/say-parsley/>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

23 Her projects are often thoroughly researched, such as her *Meddle English*, where her reading and investigations into the origins of English and the literature of Chaucer are theorised politically in 'Middling English,' the practice-based essay that opens the book. Caroline Bergvall, "Middling English," in: *Meddle English. New and Selected Texts*. Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books, 2011, pp. 5–19.

24 In a later siting of the same installation, Bergvall used the letter 'h' as the marker of difference.

harassment and verbal, sometimes physical, abuse, all according to ethnic and linguistic background.²⁵

Among other things, people were asked to say the phrase ‘rolling hills.’ Suddenly different pronunciations of the same language appeared as if this was a quasi-sociological inquiry. Then the voices were broadcast on loudspeakers in the gallery so that psychoacoustic effects would be created and listeners would have the impression that this language, which was originally English, was either Italian, Hungarian, “hidden or disused first languages resurfaced in this physical and social comprehension game.”²⁶ From this poetic experiment at the intersection of sociology, linguistics, acoustic science, and poetic practice, a procedural poem emerged which reflected the process of words morphing into others whereby the word ‘pig’ was gradually and procedurally turned into the word ‘parsley.’ Later, this poetic piece gave rise to other pieces exploring linguistic foreigning and the experience of one’s foreignness. In a later installation in Antwerp based on “Say: Parsley,” Bergvall made Dutch speakers listen to the English text of “Say: Parsley” and asked them to write down the words they thought they heard in Dutch. In this homophonic process of acoustic fooling, the notion of the absolute fixity of language was denied, just as another extremely poetic piece was created: a video was made with words projected in Dutch on the wall as the audio file of the English words are read by Bergvall, creating a powerful cross-linguistic investigation. What is remarkable in the writing environments that Bergvall explores is that she treats the *that* and the *what*, making sure that the *what* is being experienced in its full complexity. One of the reasons why this piece qualifies as literary research is that it intertwines research with and through poetic modes.

Jena Osman’s *Public Figures* as a Poetic Activation of Inquiry

In some ways, poet Jena Osman’s *Public Figures* also does that, but in a different form and with different methods. *Public Figures* is a poetic essay about our relation to public monuments and a reflection on the writing of this experiment. The book presents itself as an *inquiry* both practically and theoretically. Indeed, as every investigation, it begins with a question: “How did it occur?”²⁷ is the opening sentence, followed by two quotes and an observation

25 Bergvall (2005), *Parsley*, p. 51.

26 Bergvall (2005), *Parsley*, p. 53.

27 Osman (2012), *Public*, p. 1.

that form alternative modes of answering this question. The quotes, extracted from Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* and Roy Batty's *Blade Runner*, address the question of seeing with someone else's eyes. After the initial question, the author presents the object of her practical investigation and a renewed interrogation:

The idea occurred:

Photograph the figurative statues that populate your city. Then bring the camera to their eyes (find a way) and shoot their points of view. What does such a figure see?

To see the sigh of a sighted stone you activate the idea.²⁸

As becomes evident here, the exposition of the idea and the method is performatively *activated* in and by poetic language or by the creation of a specific *poiesis*. With alliterations in 's' and paronomasias in the last sentence, as if morphing *see* into *sigh* into *sighted*, and *stone* was part and parcel of the incipient investigation of what seeing means in language ('see the sigh'), as if, to quote Hejinian again, some of the methods were *also* poetically driven in that they did not avert "suggestions made by language."²⁹ To be sure, the poem-essay abides by some of the rules of investigation or inquiry: it has a hypothesis, a geographical terrain or field of investigation (Philadelphia), a practical method or protocol described in precise and matter-of-fact language ("you . . . jerry-rig an apparatus made from a mop handle, a disposable camera with a timer, some velcro tape. Out in the field, you observe and take notes. You set the timer and pull the pin"),³⁰ and it presents the investigation in the shape of a combination of text about and images of the field trip. Some of what might be called the 'results' of this investigation first comes as facing pages: first the photo of one statue is reproduced, then a brief prose text describes and situates the statue historically and geographically, on the facing page, the photo of what the statue 'sees' is reproduced and a text reflects on the nature of what this may mean. For instance, the statue of Major Fulton Reynolds 'looks' on a tree, the text of the facing page says:

Reynolds was very well respected, but his career had few successes. For instance, once after two long days of battle, he fell asleep under a tree and was taken prisoner for six weeks. Was that tree like that tree? Is Reynolds

28 Osman (2012), *Public*, p. 2.

29 Hejinian (2000), *Language*, p. 28.

30 Osman (2012), *Public*, p. 3.

being forced to look at an emblem of what was perhaps his greatest embarrassment?³¹

Thus described the book is very close to being a regular essay, but Osman also adds smaller fragmentary lines at the bottom of the page, as if they were fine prints, such as “possible new target approaching target one building / designate new target target five pilot copies sensor.” These fine prints are transcribed from YouTube videos of drone-pilots in Iraq exchanging with their base. They transform the nature of the book both by inscribing the context of war and updating it to nowadays but also by *activating* the book further: these tiny couplets create an almost cinematic dimension, as they function like running subtitles, and confer to consecutive pages the illusion that they could be a moving image. This hints towards the process of production, since before Osman published the book the work was presented in the form of a PowerPoint presentation in 2006, and then as a multimedia piece in 2007.³² When Osman transferred the multimedia piece into a book, she translated movement by introducing the drone couplets. These lines were totally absent from the preexisting multimedia piece. Moreover, the *poiesis* of the whole book also *activates* the language of the inquiry because, as Hejinian says, “poetry takes as its premise that language is a medium for experiencing experience.”³³ Indeed, apart from these transcribed telegraphic exchanges, the poetry is sometimes elliptic, and it sometimes appears in the guise of inconspicuous quasi-maxims such as “You wind up and throw it in the air” or “In the belly, in the clouds, no fixed orbit. You fly a hexagon.”³⁴ Sometimes it also consists of lineated descriptions of ‘images’ without the reproductions, as if the literalist ekphrasis was a way to write seeing:

Image:

The characters are praying before the bayonets.

Rather the ends of the bayonets, the points appearing from out-of-frame as narrow sharks.

Hands clasped at chest, hands clasped before the kneeling boy.

31 Osman (2012), *Public*, p. 5.

32 The multimedia piece contains voice, text and animated photographs. It can be viewed on the website of the feminist poetics journal *How2* (https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_1/public_figures/, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018). When at the end of her working notes to the piece, Osman says: “this is an ongoing project with much research left to be done,” she presents her work explicitly as *research* (https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_1/public_figures/working.html, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018).

33 Hejinian (2000), *Language*, p. 3.

34 Osman (2012), *Public*, pp. 10 and 34.

Hands clasping a robed figure.

Hands open to the sky in a faint.

Hands hiding the eyes.

Hands empty against the floorboards.

Caption: A man with two dogs on leashes. A woman with a small shopping bag. A group of individuals in a line. One cannot look at this.³⁵

The description of the so-called ‘image’ inverts the mode of reading that the book had offered in its first pages. The book thus moves from a display in which you see the picture and then read a prose text as an explanation to a different arrangement in which you read a text and thereby reconstruct a statue. In the latter case, the rhythm created by the text (here with the anaphoras of ‘hands’) seem to replicate *in absentia* the possible rhythm of the statue itself. What the reader does, then, is exactly what Osman had called “seeing the sigh of the sighted statue.” Moreover, above the ‘image’ description a so-called ‘story’ is appended, written in a few lines of prose; and below the description, a so-called ‘caption’ is added—a shorter poetic prose poem using the mode of everyday notations or lists. With all these devices the investigation is *activated* by poetry’s capacity of allowing one to experience experience. Finally, the book ends on and with poetry: each of the last eight pages contains three couplets, which reproduce the layout (and sometimes the language) of the drone couplets in the previous pages, as well as some of the most intriguing statements in the book that I described as quasi-maxims.

As an essay, the book seeks to show the situatedness of our gaze and how it might matter in times of war. At the same time, as a poem, it shows that in all these findings language matters so much that it *creates* (*poiein*) part of the real that one sees or imagines seeing. Poetry is not a beautifying genre here, it is, among other things, one of the tools, or better, the *agent* used for the inquiry itself. It is what *allows* the inquiry to find a language. Indeed, *Public Figures* lays out the *what* of its inquiry, and spells out its methods, its tools (drawings, arrows, photographs, narrative, quotations ...), as well as the experience of its experience through language. It can, therefore, be considered an example of the brand of literary research that one might call practice-based research.

Conclusion

To come back to Hejinian’s statements that “the reasons and reasonings that motivate poet (and poem) are embedded in the world and in the language

35 Osman (2012), *Public*, p. 38.

with which we bring it into view,” and that “the resulting praxis is addressed to phenomenological and epistemological concerns,” one could posit, in light of Bergvall’s and Osman’s work, that the contemporary modes of literary research pursue a slightly different approach. For sure, similar as Hejinian conceives it, Bergvall’s “Say: Parsley” and *Public Figures* are inquiries. However, they are specific in that they rely more strongly on documentation, interviews, or idiosyncratic pursuits of quasi-socio-poetic importance. As I have tried to show, if artistic research wishes not to be reified, it needs to open itself up to such hybridisations. But above all, in my opinion, it needs to open itself up to poetry and its powerful linguistic modes of activation of research—and not just to fiction or narrative.

Meanwhile, it does not seem helpful to designate exclusive themes for literary research. To take an extreme example, love, death, and other such traditional themes may be broached by literary artistic research, just like they have been and still are investigated by sociology. Literary research should not be so much concerned with its themes as with its modes and modalities. One of them is the mode of *inquiry*, which, as I tried to show, it shares with artistic writing. In fact, by describing and exploring the specific mode of *inquiry*, I wanted to suggest that Bergvall’s and Osman’s works—today commonly filed under artistic writing—may serve the purpose of complexifying some of the givens of artistic research.

Wesseling claims that “artistic research distinguishes itself from art history by the pivotal role art practice has in the research. Whereas art historians do research *into* art made by others, artistic research is research *in and through* art by the artist him- or herself.”³⁶ Her first sentence will not hold for literary research because poets practice language as much as critics and literary historians do. As practice-based criticism illustrates, the frontiers between regular essays and essay-poems are sometimes not easy to determine. Wesseling’s second sentence might be more fruitful for literary research, but here the problem arises that she seems to restrict this type of research to the function of a singular author, namely, “the artist him- or herself.” Wesseling is not considering broader and more collective processes of writing, and she is also not considering more hybrid subjectivities, such as a poet that is also a critic (Charles Bernstein or Lyn Hejinian), or a poet that is also an art historian, artist, and a critic (Marjorie Welish). In my opinion, the high level of hybridisation in contemporary practices allows for subtle and supple definitions of literary research, which might be better called literary artistic research. I hope to have shown that literature has a potential as artistic research and that literature must *also* be

36 Wesseling (2016), *Of Sponge*, p. 9.

envisaged within the broader perspective of writing, so that literary research may be regarded as *artistic* research.

After all, Corina Caduff's question "Why has literature been left out of [the] discourse [of artistic research]?"³⁷ might be supplemented by another question: why should literature not be envisaged as an art? Indeed, what happens currently in art schools and creative writing departments in universities shows a renewed dialogue between visual or performance arts and literary practices. At the University of Paris 8, where I teach, the MA in *écriture littéraire* often enrolls students from art schools as well as students from literary studies. The intertwining of artistic practices and literary practices should breed new forms of writers-artists.

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NOW is Always. NOW is Never. On the Immediacy and Mediation of 'Message' in Poetry

Ferdinand Schmatz

Abstract:

What characterises poetry that is understood as carrying out research? How does it generate knowledge on a poetological basis? It shapes the moment of the present, the 'Now,' immediately mediated—a paradox that provokes the path to a different, poetically researched knowledge. The approaches, methods, and constructions necessary to create these spaces of individual symbolisation are presented. At the same time, an attempt is made to approach the reflections of Alfred North Whitehead on cultural symbolisation and its modes of experience.

1

Poetry and language form a symbiosis; that is nothing new under the sun of literature. In poetic research, however, the significance of language is a more specific one: here, language is understood and used literally as meaning-endowing material and not just as a bearer of these meanings. A style that deliberately construes poetry as a methodological and linguistic-reflexive handling of language raises the question of the meaning of a word and a statement—and also of meaning itself. This question of the possibilities of how the world is and can be representable and communicable is connected to that of linguistic-systematic interpretations: we are thinking of a poetic attitude that hopes for and practises the production or elicitation of the world out of linguistic movements, whereby the linguistic part does not only serve stylistic interests.

This production—*poiesis* means to manufacture, to bring into being, to elicit—proves to be an interplay of a poetic ego that is constantly in motion with an associated linguistic reflection and construction. The dismantling and building of this ego lead to the producing of poetry that can be viewed as artistic research.

Observing, collecting, ordering, analysing, reflecting are the fields that characterise the work of this reality-critiquing poetry: systemic linguistic parameters such as those of syntax and grammar, criteria of the assignation of

meaning by the dictionary, encyclopedic and cyclic procedures enable the development of methodological positions and contribute to the reconstruction of reality. They are some of the methodical-formal characteristics of what can be considered poetic research, which they more than just codetermine.

This language work, which regards the relationship between content and form as an equitable interaction that can be mutually developed, is broadly construed and not just mere material processing. The desire to work with the dominant discourse also arises from the orientation towards the questions and working steps of the medial expansion of poetry, such as those regarding the relationship between word and picture, picture and object, word and object in analogue as well as digital types, etc. In any case, it arises from a profound desire to celebrate and criticise the symbolically given world.

This poetry does not preach separatism of art but insists on the autonomy of the aesthetic function (after Roman Jakobson). Its aesthetic-ethical attitude and procedure are especially relevant for the styles addressed here in the sense of artistic research. Its primary focus is on a field that is individual and personal, yet co-determined by collective laws: it observes, grasps, and thereby attempts to reposition the aesthetic, social, and economic impacts of the writing process.

Poetic, colloquial, and other social-linguistic forms are examined, reduced, or expanded. Fundamental interpretations are kept in mind. A poetical act in the field of contexts radically breaks or ironically interrogates the 'content' prescribed: the meaning of a single word is determined in relation to the words surrounding it, and its effect in the social-aesthetic field is examined, poetically transformed, and documented in an adequate form. This can also happen through the linguistic conversion of rule-conforming algorithms that poetically 'reprogramme' those experiences stored in the memory, thus breaking expectations and bringing us the point of realisation: The utilised linguistic, pictorial or other medial resources are ascribed a special significance. They are forms of resistance that, on the one hand, are those of the discourse bearer, but on the other hand are transformed by poetical empowerment. Or representations of a different positioning of reality—a world that thus becomes a reality of realities, a world of worlds.

These realities and worlds co-write poetry, but how? "The poem is finished before its author knows." Does this still apply today—decades after Gottfried Benn's account of the "Problems of the Lyric"—for the poetic research discussed here? It may be prefabricated as 'finished' in the interior of a more or less unconscious knowledge process. Nevertheless, the decision as to which contents in which forms (and vice versa) ultimately come to light—i.e. to the page, the screen, etc.—lies with the poets. It is the writers who put the

previously condensed point of the statement on display in a final state of complexity. But this final state is not ideologically solidified in the sense of a single valid statement; rather, it is open and creates a kind of free space that liberates the thinking about what its message and truth can be.

At least in its interpretation and reception. This—it should be stressed—must by no means be confused with arbitrariness or indifference on the part of the statement or of the expressed content.

The transformation of that which is commonly traded and sold as information—the transformation of information into the ‘open’ message—is what connects these poems and qualifies them as poetry in the aforementioned sense: they question meaning and re-endow meaning—through a comprehensive consideration of the prerequisites and fundamentals of writing and its possibilities for translating a given reality. Concerning the extensions as well as contractions of reality. An experiment in a laboratory of the interior, interlocking forms and contents collected from the outside world in the individual styles. It leads to that poem in the poetic space, written or constructed by other media, which will have a different effect on the internal and the external social field in which the styles originated.

Despite the dominance of the analysis of linguistic processes within and beyond the writing subject, other parameters, as indicated, also flow into and constitute the styles: figurative contributions in particular that reduce or expand the usual metaphorical content of the poetry. Internal images that are constructed without external experience but also those that originate from the observation and experience of the external world, and therefore may also have a direct political content. These multi-tiered levels of the medial discourses—literal and pictorial communication practices, etc.—are transformed and translated, respectively, into a poetically developed language.

This process of translation turns poetry into poetry. It is fundamentally essential for the poetic research described here if we understand it as a transposition of given words, sentences, images, and experiences into new or different constellations. Günter Eich defined poetry as “a word translated into a word.” A word is transformed into another word, lifted from one place to another—from the sentence in which it stands, from the dictionary in which it is fixed, into a different sentence structure or medium in which it finds its new meaning. Or it can adopt the fixed meaning differently; in a poetically reconstituted book of the world of worlds.

Their contents, as forms, can thereby be freely developed associatively, but they can also be methodically guided along their paths—each depending on the intention and disposition of what the poetical work of the respective writer determines. An alternation between method and the undercutting of

this method is also conceivable and occurs. In any case, there are, so to speak, internal experimental arrangements beyond the methodological procedures, such as e.g. self-observation in the internal and external space, which is scarcely accepted by conventional science. This approaches a—tentative—search for truthfulness, deeply anchored in the corporeal and intellectual motives of the individual authors, which make the poem a fundamental poetry: to reach through this and in this the comprehensive experience of a specific and not arbitrary world of worlds.

2

In an incidental remark in his *Cahiers*—and here the question arises of whether there are incidental remarks in poetic thought at all—Paul Valéry points to the relationship between stupidity and poetry. It is a mysterious passage, but thinking, and particularly poetic-poetological thinking, serves to decipher mysteries or to posit them with the desire to explore the world. Deciphering and positing—these would be, in addition to the already mentioned trajectories, to be pursued by a poetic research. Thus: deciphering and positing, taking into account and integrating emerging secondary aspects, which can be incorporated *ad hoc* into the goal-oriented ‘first thinking’—would that be sensible or stupid, idiotic in Valéry’s sense?

Stupidity or idiocy, as understood by Valéry, is not a human defect, but a kind of ability to perceive and shape reality, or what has been defined as such, differently. It is, first of all, of no consequence whether ‘real’ spaces of action are maintained for this purpose. It is about the possibilities of the imagination, or even better: of a ‘pre-positing’ [*Vorstellung*], which allows turning world models experienced in the inner world into real ones. We are thinking not only about Robert Musil’s sense of possibilities, with which he complements the sense of reality. Even the ‘language of the insane,’ as it was called in the first half of the 20th century after the *zeitgeist* and is still called by the incorrigible, speaks of its own reality. “The mentally ill have been deprived of everything, except their minds,” *Poeta Doctus* Reinhard Priessnitz formulated. His poetic work, by the way, is one of the essential examples of the poetics of the knowledge that emerges through poetry. A work that creates this knowledge in process—from a poetic way of generating modes of thinking and speaking. A poetry that emerges from a research intention that, as more than just a gesture, sounds out and attempts to reevaluate every given reality.

The resultant snapshots of realities lead to a kind of truth of the insight into time, which has to be regenerated again and again. This still has its nucleus to

be elaborated, and the nucleus will be co-formed in this attempt at exposure. The goal is to set no goal before the elaboration, but to advance the goal, as it were, methodically regulated or 'freely associative' (which often makes no difference). And to understand the writing progress for this purpose. Therein lies the comprehensibility or connectivity addressed at the beginning, also in the reception of the poetry writer himself.

We call this reception understanding, or at least an aspect of understanding, as the poetic work jeopardises the traditional parameters of understanding. And it constantly attempts to determine this jeopardy, to integrate it into the already established positions or to discard it, if it should drift past these nuclei. We refer to these nuclei as the inner knowledge that precedes a process of cognition—'flashes before us,' as it were—and thus before knowledge finds its form of representation. According to Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, we should say 'it lightens' just as we say 'it thinks.' Or, let us call this the kind of knowledge which brings about thought in "the gradual construction of speech" (Heinrich von Kleist). The thought, or the knowledge, that slumbers within us before its language-mediated transformation (possibly pre-linguistically) or that is brought forth during this transformation. That arises, develops, and is open to new connections to a (perhaps dumb-appearing) correctness. Knowledge that retroactively pushes forward and transmutes itself, and poetry, and us as recipients. This way towards transformation, however, involves paths that form differently, that shun the predetermined linguistic patterns. Or take them literally. Not infrequently word-for-word.

What arises here is, to begin with, the incomprehensible or mysterious, or, more beautifully said: the miraculous, but which has the character of deciphering the world. Comparable to the progressive universal poetics of Romanticism, but going beyond that. A 'contemporary' miracle which also arises from analytical processes. Processes that are employed in poetry or artistic design, apart from the synthetic, which flow in and out of the various fields of knowledge into actual work.

A poetic-artistic research that seeks or constructs the 'other' truths or realities—and understands these processes as the generation of knowledge. A knowledge that claims nothing new under the sun, but that opens up different perspectives to the world. A venture willing to take the risk of setting out for the unknown shore beyond the conventions, which is sometimes not connected by a bridge to the departed mainland. A 'crazy' undertaking, but in the sense of a truth of the relations that result from the displacement of the given.

And it seems to be this 'truth' that Paul Valéry names in his bold pairing of poetry and stupidity. A 'truth' that includes the aspects of reordering and reconstructing given reality parameters through others, heaved from a new

pattern of thinking. Constructing a reality (often dismissed in the scientific 'diagnosis' as a figment of the imagination or a pipe dream) which appears in a poetically specific developed manner, unmediated or even mediated in and before the poetic ego.

Specifically, this ego is also in jeopardy—literally in play. It is part of a language game, which it attempts to appropriate in order to become the ego therein and thereby. Which the game helps to bring about. To find its own rules and to mix them with the given ones. This, in turn, is not to be accepted, but to be arrived at: to create a word-place that is also available for the readers, despite the often ironic and unfathomable word and speech rules.

In poetry, connotations of words that have two or more meanings open places and spaces of the real that are appointed and placed in relation to the given and found others. The lyric ego is not one that sighs, but one that performs that sighing—its linguistic and existential conditions—in and as a poem itself. There, thence, and therein, it gives its call, yearning, seeking its place, referring to all the other places and spaces that are laid out in its words and concepts.

A kind of scanner set over the world represents what has gone through the poetic filtering, what is left over, to search for other contact points and regions. Where the everyday fetters of existence are linguistically arranged and discarded to achieve an existence of freedom. A desire for individuality and collectivity in the shared experience of the negotiation of language as a rule of life spreads and strives for fulfilment.

Thus, the 'real' plane of action is invoked to reconcile abstract thinking with physical experience. Noise and silence get the chance to 'speak,' arising from the observation of the movements of the world, the language movements and the movements of the image, in the body and in the external world. In the process, the relationship between observation and writing is very often reversed. Writing makes observation possible. Also by us readers.

3

It is precisely this moment that will guide us in our reflections on the 'Now' in poetry, and thus on the notion of "presentational immediacy" or "immediate clarity" in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. He puts this 'presentational immediacy' first, while 'causal efficacy,' for him, forms only the second mode of experience. This usually becomes effective after 'presentational immediacy,' the 'dream' of all empirical art. The unmediated reality is always one that is mediated, however; it cannot be otherwise: with and from words which move from the smallest units of letters to syntactically constructed verses. To

construct those spaces as image-sets that could not yet be opened in the usual way of descriptions. Multilayer language complexes and image sequences, which are produced or even taken up and reassembled. Beyond whole words, back to syllables and letters, which are more than representatives of the given language material.

Yes, this poetic research is—to summarise once again—composed of several strata: the stratum of the linguistic material may be the basis or the building blocks for a pictorial and word topology of the interior, which then intersects with that of the exterior to multiply and to visualise itself potentially spatially as a poem-entity. Which spaces are necessary for this? Basing this on experience or conception, we say immediately: experience is process, and we think of Whitehead's 'reality as process.' But this means, in turn, that in order to experience reality or the poetically constructed spaces, to learn to understand them, something must first be moved in us: our mapped-out imaginative spaces, the images, and the words and phrases connected with them. The models that, as conceptual bearers, do not only represent reality but also construct it. Even if this reality and its models should never be reproducible as a whole. Hence, it is necessary not only to accept those spaces, which are caused to be interpreted by images and words, as fundamental significances, but moreover, to explore, to test, and thus to experiment, in order to generate other meanings in poetry, especially in the poem itself and in us. Then the poem moves itself and us into these spaces of possible and constructed meanings, and we are therefore moved—stirred, understood.

In this comprehensive complex of a whole experience, parts of it are focused on that truth, which finds expression in the correspondence of the previously experienced with the newly experienced. An expression that lies within the interiors of the experiential and connects the patterns of memory or stored images and words with newly emerging ones, and unites them into the message to be accepted.

Involved in this message, however, is a not insignificant proportion of self-construction: it can only be compared to what is stored in the memory of the individual. The complexity we incorporate makes it appear as if the constructed message were objective. Essentially, highly individually attuned programmes are running here, which are similar in their status to automated programmes in all of us. The difference is what they are filled with. This distinction, which makes us individuals, does not exclude something like a communicable message without relying on an objective truthfulness that is attained one-by-one.

This truthfulness, therefore, lies more in the receiver than in the sender of the message or information. It comes through the channels of noise in the eye, ear, and in the skin of the viewer, the listener, or the touching person. Deviating,

it is formed into what we call the understanding of information or message, or even truth—through construction with the language in the language, also in media-expanded form and practice. As work of the non-sensical or circum-sensical, which applies to the poet herself as well as to her recipients—in highly composed sagas and writings of semantics, syntax, and verse settings, synthesising connotations, and association chains. A metric of being without metaphysical speculation, which does not attempt to approximate a transcendent truth. Which rather transforms truth into the play of word and image, and, in doing so, all the more constitutes something fundamentally existential.

Despair and pleasure at the failure to grasp the whole along with the detail: this is perhaps the stupidity Valéry meant. But through the work of poetic research, in the sense suggested here, this failure—indeed this stupidity—becomes fundamental poetry, which attempts to extend those aforementioned spaces of knowledge.

As already said, the usual path of knowledge work, which presents knowledge from experience, should be abandoned. Or it should be used in unorthodox ways to reach other fields of knowledge. In a sense, an artifice which whirls around the culturally expected symbolisation (as Whitehead also illuminated). The result is a revolution in the known relationship between symbol and meaning that constitutes our common knowledge of the world. Where a forest consists of individual trees which receive their names or meaning from the textbook and are summed up into a fixed and coherent entity of a forest.

In the poetic arts, however, it looks like this: the tree exists only during the observation of the forest, the other trees, and then receives its meaning in the moment of perception. It is only created, as it were, by the linguistic designation in consciousness. It is as if the concept of the forest did not consist of the named individual trees, but rather the tree consisted of the not-yet-named forest. The trees are created by the names. The words. Moreover, this observation does not have to occur on the spot. It can also be taken from the designations in the textbook and vice versa. The symbol becomes real and the real symbolic. *Literal. Verbatim. Image-yielding.*

The poetry thus created does not discover and reinvent the world in this reversal or constant alternation of symbol and meaning—how could this be possible? However, it does build up the world insofar as it pounds on observations of the external world, which are interpreted in the inner world of the poet as symbols and transformed into words. Moreover, through the rhythm of the poetry, they also become an (at least brief) immediate perception and experience of reality—in the poet himself and the reader. Addressing an ‘I,’ a ‘you,’ or a

third person can be helpful. It aids the participatory incorporation of the readers into the text. It represents a world for all who engage in the perspective of poetical observation and change with it—thus leading to ever new viewpoints and the associated development of world variations.

The language that achieves this is found in all poetry that is thinking fundamentally immediately, and that is speaking presentationally. What comes to speak and to be written is a poetology that reworks, advances, and undermines the given forms (often primarily syntactic and grammatical). Or that expands the forms in typically individualised ways by switching their hierarchies and the related spatial and temporal orders. For us who read this poetry, something opens that we have not glimpsed before and therefore did not know. It creates our world by producing and exhibiting itself—it builds itself and us: trees are made, manufactured. But as the proverb says, we do not see the forest for the trees when we are overwhelmed or obstructed. This does not mean that it is possible to decipher the forest only by finding and naming its trees. If it is logically predicative, then in the sense of attributing meanings, which are perpetually rearranged by words and word constellations.

And which can always make other assignments possible. The inner world and the outer world then interweave in the word ‘tree,’ which grows into the storyline ‘forest.’ An originally fixed conceptual quantity that becomes a double, a multiple. That can be further developed in other verses, or words, or word pairs and linked to other aspects.

The glimpse of causal efficacy becomes the vision of presentational immediacy. But always only briefly. Now is always. Now is never.

Translation from German by Jason S. Heilman.

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Poetics of Understanding: Language Arts and Artistic Research

Alexander Damianisch

Abstract:

What role does research play for the language arts? What is the significance of the language arts for research? This text attempts to sketch the outlines of this relation on the personal-general level and basis of selected poetics, based on statements by language artists. In essence, the thesis is that the potentials of the language arts can and should increasingly be integrated into the discourse of both research and artistic research for a better understanding.

The question arises . . . as to whether the extent of these sectors on the plane assumed by us can be enlarged to any vital degree by the work of research. The achievements of the microscope, of the telescope, and of so many devices which increase the range of the senses upward and downward: do they not lie in another sphere altogether, since most of the increase thus achieved cannot be interpreted by the senses, cannot be 'experienced' in any real sense? It is, perhaps, not premature to suppose that the artist, who develops the five-fingered hand of his senses (if one may put it so) to ever more active and more spiritual capacity, contributes more decisively than anyone else to an extension of the several sense fields, only the achievement which gives proof of this does not permit of his entering his personal extension of territory in the general map before us, since it is only possible, in the last resort, by a miracle.¹

RAINER MARIA RILKE, *Primal Sound*

Search Becomes Research

How does one learn to understand better? What role does language play in that? When is the moment when its use becomes a tool for art and research?

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Primal Sound* (1919), in: *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces*, translated by G. Craig Houston. London: Quartet 1986, pp. 128–130: here p. 130.

Everything begins with hearing, seeing, and reading. First, the goals are close at hand: the lettering on shops, road maps, comic books, headlines in magazines and, of course, what is written in school textbooks, instructions, explanations, and assignments. Follow toy catalogues, lists of inventories of objects and the possibilities they embody. One studies the lists to find the right object.² One learns what is worthwhile, what one wants to have; one begins to imagine. This is the first part of the stage in which one uses language by gathering writing via reading. Then maybe one starts to become interested in dinosaurs, in tennis players, in a singer and wants to keep going. One learns to know, in addition to what one receives, what one is told or what happens on other paths. The goal is to understand in order to deduce how everything is or could be. The search becomes research; this is what Rainer Maria Rilke calls “the extension of territories.”³ Friedrich Kittler wrote: “Rilke draws conclusions more radical than all scientific boldness.”⁴ He extends the territories of understanding.

Questioning of Phenomena

The interpretation of objects collected by Rilke in the group of *New Poems* is an example of the questioning of phenomena with regard to their potential. It concerns the focused concentration on phenomena. Interestingly, this is done in response to Rilke's *reading*⁵ of Auguste Rodin's⁶ and Paul Cézanne's⁷ work. Apropos of the desire to find a way of working, a method, that makes new seeing and shaping possible, Rilke explicitly developed a detached and analytical working method. Paul de Man called this “impersonality.”⁸ To grasp the object is the first

2 There is a known and well researched tendency in literature that lists and/or inventories are a well-considered technique to pinpoint the given and thereby develop new ways of understanding. (Cf. Günter Eich, *Inventur*, in: Günter Eich, *Abgelegene Gehöfte. Mit vier Holzschnitten von Karl Rössing*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1948, pp. 42–43.)

3 Rilke (1986), *Primal Sound*, p. 130.

4 Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 42.

5 In a more literal sense, it would be more consequent to use the word ‘seeing’ here, especially in relation to the concept of seeing in *Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910).

6 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin* (1903), translated by G. Craig Houston. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006.

7 Cf. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne* (1952), translated by Joel Agee, ed. by Clara Rilke. New York, NY: North Point Press, 2002.

8 Cf. “It will take the long labors of *Malte* and of *The New Poems* to reconquer the impersonality” (Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven, CT, London: Yale University Press, 1979, p. 33).

step towards collecting. As Rilke so succinctly and appropriately said of the experiences of Malte Laurids Brigge in the city: “Have I said it before? I am learning to see.”⁹ This means he is learning to read the things and to understand anew.

The Lure of Boundaries

In a next personal step, correlations begin to show. Individuals move closer in specific relationships with each other; steps become paths; pictures become films. Relations are perceived. Stories are read to us, then the ‘I’ and ‘you,’ the personal, become more and more exciting. The lure of boundaries starts to play a role. You slide into different states. You surf on unknown waves. The temptations create the transgression, the transgression the temptations. Helga Nowotny has placed inquisitiveness in the centre of her epistemic theories.¹⁰

Daniel Kehlmann, for example, still recounts his influential early reading of Jeremias Gotthelf’s *The Black Spider*.¹¹ The fascination of the unfamiliar, the uncanny, is evident.¹² You are tempted to move into these worlds. By reading, you discover what else you would not have learned—and also what you cannot know. You explore unknown areas, practise making an attempt. The explicit process of surveying unknown terrain is also the focus of Christoph Ransmayer’s work.¹³ Especially *Atlas of an Anxious Man* is a fine example in this sense. The ‘man’ is already labelled as ‘anxious,’ and his goal of developing an ‘atlas’ is named in the very title of Ransmayer’s text collection. He wants to map the challenging area. Another example for this is Kehlmann’s novel, *Measuring the*

9 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York, NY: Vantage 1990, p. 6.

10 Cf. Helga Nowotny, *Unersättliche Neugier: Innovation in einer fragilen Zukunft*. Berlin: Kadmos, 2005.

11 Cf. Daniel Kehlmann, *Kommt, Geister. Frankfurter Vorlesungen*. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2015.

12 Ferdinand Schmatz talks about the beginning of his relationship with literature in relation to his so-called “Kafka literature phase,” he explains: “[T]he abstraction, and what existed behind it, I found extremely attractive. Now I would call it erotic. There was such a tension between individual and dependence and desire, which has not been fulfilled, and sometimes is, or nearly is.” This, among other things, was Ferdinand Schmatz’s response to the question of how he went “from reader to writer.” (Ferdinand Schmatz, *Auf SÄTZE!: Essays zur Poetik, Literatur und Kunst*. Berlin: De Gruyter 2016, p. 314.)

13 The following titles are listed by way of an example: *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis (The Terrors of Ice and Darkness)*. Wien, Munich: Brandstätter, 1984; *Morbis Kitahara (The Dog King)*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1995; *Der Weg nach Surabaya (The Way to Surabaya)*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997; *Der fliegende Berg (The Flying Mountain)*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2006; *Atlas eines ängstlichen Mannes (Atlas of an Anxious Man)*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2012.

World,¹⁴ again already the title itself sets the stage. Different, but in comparison also relevant is Marlene Haushofer's *The Wall*. This novel, again, questions the territory of the possible in a very clear literal sense, describing the limitations of the woman protagonist as being cut off from society in the wild, without any possibility of expanding her territory of action back to relevance again, to put it short. What appears in this case as the real issue is the discourse without relations, one could say the numb discourse that is the stage and in many cases the very field and challenge of language arts and research.

Extension of the Sense Fields

The need for a simple visual, cartographic order is the subject of criticism in the conclusion of Rilke's text *Primal Sound*. The critique is directed against the presumptuousness of established research areas. Rilke demands respect for the artist's activity towards "an extension of the several sense fields,"¹⁵ whether through the use of language or other matter. What is not understood, should be visited—not so much to measure it, but to convey it.

Quite some authors of the recent literary history are travelling on the boundaries of these sense fields. The novel of Michel Houellebecq's, *The Map and the Territory*, is of relevance here because the protagonist does nothing but conquer the space with his art pieces.¹⁶ Even writers like Marlen Haushofer play a particular role in this journey, and another in the slightly vivid context of German literature is Elfriede Jelinek. They are two excellent examples of authors who process and bring to perception radical reflexes. Their representations of the invisible present the violence that had long been neglected and could only be made visible through its application to the map. Having become identifiable, the violence can potentially be mastered in relation to the given discourse without relations. It can become an integral part of the map of social awareness as an object of examination and analysis for better understanding.

The Possibility of the Familiar Becoming Alien

Regarding understanding, the relation between the familiar and the unknown, one might connect the language arts themselves as research with the idea of

14 Daniel Kehlmann, *Measuring the World*, translated by Carol Brown Janeway. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2005.

15 Rilke (1986), *Primal Sound*, p. 130.

16 Cf. Michel Houellebecq, *The Map and the Territory*, translated by Gavin Bowd. New York, NY: Knopf, 2011.

science fiction. For there is always science that threatens to explain the field of research as such. The term science fiction has a peculiar sound. It is not just the unimaginable that can be heard here. Concretely, one must think of knowledge (apropos science) on the one hand and idea (apropos fiction) on the other: the known, held by knowledge, experiences perspectives in a next stage. With this twist, we have arrived poetologically, where the language arts can be understood as artistic research.

Let us remember Heinrich von Kleist's proposition: "People could be divided into two classes: those who understand a metaphor, and 2) those who understand a formula. Those who understand both are too few; they do not comprise a class."¹⁷ In the metaphor the known is loaded with ideas; these ideas are transmitted. In the formula, the unknown is put into frameworks by means of an explanatory apparatus. To test, prove, or disapprove. Can this be considered as conducting an experiment?

The example of the atlas, as already mentioned apropos of Ransmayer, provides such a methodical framework. It enables the measurement of catastrophic or at least open-ended events in a strict order in which findings are made communicable. Understanding wants to go beyond what is offered, also methodologically, what is out there or what could be, whether invented or genuinely tempting. The possibility that the familiar becomes alien and the development of tools to support this are of interest. In the desire for better understanding, reading will begin to become a way to penetrate past diversions into possibilities.

Research is Taking Shape

From early on, language becomes writing to leave traces and to challenge us via text. The search for what one has discovered leads to one's own attempts to set things down. One develops style. One begins to imbue the instrument of language with experience. The Language becomes its path, which one slowly feels and shapes retrospectively. It is a way to share and develop understanding. The practice of the language arts takes shape and reformulates itself anew, like the horizon, which is always created anew on approach. This is the moment when the understanding of the shaping of reality and its possibilities becomes stronger than the spontaneous perception of what you have learned to recognise as real. Research is taking shape. This is the case when a method is developed from the power of mastering language, which enables one to better

17 Heinrich von Kleist, *Fragmente*, in: *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, zweibändige Ausgabe in einem Band, ed. by Helmut Sembdner. Munich: DTV, 2001, p. 338.

understand and recognise when new and different things emerge from the—formal and content-related—probing of boundaries. This is precisely what Rilke did with the *New Poems* and, as an author, his character Malte implemented through his notebooks.

Content-wise, what you want to understand better can be anything. Everything is available, and with this instrument it is possible to extend everything methodically, to expand the field, and thereby begin to create, to produce, to develop. Ernst-Wilhelm Händler, for example, attempted to analyse the novel as such a methodological instrument with his essay *Versuch über den Roman als Erkenntnisinstrument*.¹⁸ A business school graduate, entrepreneur, and author with a lively stream of publications, Händler has repeatedly produced texts that present an expedient documentary of reality experiments, as Hermann Broch had previously done—or Gustave Flaubert. In such cases, the language arts in novel form help to understand, as Pierre Bourdieu demonstrated about Flaubert.¹⁹ On another occasion, Bourdieu even identifies with Karl Kraus and sees in his work the sociological experiment ideally developed.²⁰ This provides another example where language arts have succeeded in inserting impassible terrain into a new sense field on our map. It is of great interest that the influential relation between Kraus and Rilke is a vital, crucial bridge that opened up a path for such developments.²¹

18 Ernst-Wilhelm Händler, *Versuch über den Roman als Erkenntnisinstrument*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2014.

19 Pierre Bourdieu's analysis in *The Rules of Art* provides an ideal example: based on a novel—*Sentimental Education* by Gustave Flaubert—it is shown precisely how clever the language arts are and how capably they can make things more sympathetic to us. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, translated by Susan Emanuel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

20 In the first paragraph of *Satz und Gegensatz*, Pierre Bourdieu writes: "The philosophical tradition and its claim to call common sense into question, to the point of its ultimate logical consequences, I have directed the scientifically acquired instruments of objectification against . . . the world of the intellectuals themselves, a world which still leaves the most critical critics untouched, with the exception of perhaps one Karl Kraus, whose provocations partly corresponded to the real sociological experiments through which the seemingly most obvious indifference and disinterestedness can be unmasked." (Pierre Bourdieu, *Satz und Gegensatz. Über die Verantwortung des Intellektuellen*. Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1989, p. 7.)

21 The issue of the *Fackel* published by Karl Kraus with the war-critical essay "In this great time" of December 5, 1914, had been sent by Rainer Maria Rilke to his friend Lou Andreas-Salomé, with the enclosed remarks in parenthesis: "The last consequences of the impossibilities, in which we have lived. The fate will be precise . . ." (Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefwechsel: Rainer Maria Rilke – Lou Andreas Salome*, ed. by Ernst Pfeiffer. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1989, p. 585.)

One Prize for Two

At this point, it should be pointed out again that art and science do not resist each other in their practice, but both exist together. This assertion resonates with Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's finding that the differentiation between art (poetology) and science (epistemology) was recent. He writes:

The fact that the sciences and the arts have historically created at least meta-stable, separate realms must at least be noted, even if this separation did not always and everywhere exist, and if perhaps it will not always remain so. It might well be, however, that this separation is a secondary effect—collateral damage, so to speak—of the respective stabilization at the level of social negotiation, communication and distribution, and is due less to the conditions of the creation of epistemic and artistic values. What we can do is to stake out a discursive space in which it is possible for scientists and artists to examine each other's hands, based less on what they say than on what they do when they practice their craft.²²

Again, we are staking out a space; again, we are travelling together on a map.

If you leap back in time, one example of a tradition which does not know of a separation of research into art and science can be found in the "beautiful science." That is how the language arts were called by Johann Joachim Eschenburg in his *Preliminaries of a Theory and Literature of the Beautiful Sciences* (1783).²³ It would be time to review this designation for its suitability in current artistic research. It is about form, finding the right form, precisely by means of language-artistic methods and poetics. On the one hand, it is a matter of normative descriptions in the sense of established rules; on the other hand, it is recording descriptive attempts to find what is happening when poetic work is done.

As a winning thesis in the context of artistic research, it is essential to maintain that if you engage in something without knowing, you are best supported by better understanding. In the set of possible parameters, there is a possible

22 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Episteme zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst*. Unpublished manuscript to a paper given at the IFK: Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, Vienna, 4 Mar. 2015, p. 20.

23 Johann Joachim Eschenburg, *Entwurf einer Theorie und Literatur der schönen Wissenschaften* (1783), in: *Lyriktheorie. Texte vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Ludwig Völker. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000. Text (1783; abridged) with introduction and commentaries: pp. 105–113; also available at: https://www.uni-due.de/lyriktheorie/texte/1783_b4eschenburg.html#gliederung3, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

formation, a mixture of time and space, idea and matter, ability and impulse, in which understanding becomes possible. Art and science have developed into two central sediment fields. The conscious step of focusing on how these two fields are constituted is essential. On the other hand, it is crucial to address dynamics that are fundamental in what is deemed a researching approach.

Emergent and Transgressive for the Sake of Understanding

Poetic work is the core of artistic work in dealing with language, a dynamic, vital force, a permanent unrest of meaning. This unrest is doubly charged; it is the standard denominator when you attempt to recapitulate what unites art and science. 'Art' encompasses all practice currently being negotiated in the field, including the performing arts and, naturally, visual arts, applied arts and liberal arts. It is always a matter of connecting levels of perception and form, the latter being the complementary of research in the arts, particularly in comparison to research in the sciences. On the scientific side, it is above all the reflection which can explicitly be called an idiosyncrasy, from which art now benefits as research. It is, therefore, perception, reflection, and formation that act in conjunction.

If we now take poetry as an effective force and recall the origin of the word, that is, its meaning of creating or shaping, from the Greek *poieîn*—meaning production—then the broader meaning of the concept is shown. The career of the concept of poetry, understood not as a poetic catalogue of governing forms, but as a possibility of linguistically shaping things, is a massively moving one; we move it further and perhaps return to a new meaning and relevance. There are two different paths in literary studies: the first refers primarily to the text, the second to the context. Both paths attempt to open up meaning and to better understand what texts signify and what meanings they try to bring to understanding. Often, this is also broadened by the question of relevance placed on it, measuring how importantly we should take literature and its study. Remember that Theodor W. Adorno referred to style as the "habitus of language."²⁴

In conclusion to this text and regarding the question of who among the peers is the heir and who the donor, the 'research' in 'artistic research' or the 'language' in the 'language arts,' I would say that 'art' is the solution. Art never existed without a research praxis and reflective quality related to language; literature and artistic research have always interacted, emergent and transgressive

²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998, p. 45.

for the sake of a better understanding, etc. Thank you for sharing my personal “extension of” our “territory” (Rilke).

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Aspect Change and Poetic Charge as Tools for Artistic Research in Literature

Tine Melzer

Abstract:

Literature produces images by putting the words in the best possible order; non-literary writing, reflection, argumentation, analysis, and critique are done by writing, too. Both modes of writing use language as their material. By using the different status and value of autonomous and discursive modes of writing we can find a departure point for supporting a productive methodology in artistic research in literature.

A selection of instruments borrowed from philosophy and visual arts connect to show an experiential and practice-based approach, such as ‘aspect seeing,’ the concept of poetic charge and images in language. Aspect seeing is a crucial perceptive and cognitive mechanism and apt to disclose interrelations between production and interpretation of literature.

Spelling It Out

It is time to host a discussion about practice-based investigations of literary art forms and to let literature finally emerge in the panorama of practice-based research in the arts. Literature is a field of art. Literary production means creating artworks by using written language. There is no reason why this area of creative practice should be less suitable or more problematic for artistic research than any other field, be it visual arts, music, theatre, performance, dance, or composition. On the contrary, offering institutionalised practice-based PhD research opportunities in literature is overdue. But it may just require more careful looking, as text looks like text—ordered letters on paper—and without reading it one cannot tell what the text is like—either in terms of sort or quality.

In the past discourse on ‘artistic research’—which historically departed from visual arts towards live performance formats and finally arrives in the field of literary art forms¹—specific suggestions and claims have been made regarding

¹ Corina Caduff, “Literatur und künstlerische Forschung,” in: Corina Caduff et al., eds., *Kunst und Künstlerische Forschung*. Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010, pp. 108–117: here p. 108.

the matter and methods by which art and research should connect, interrelate, and depend on each other. In the current discussion on artistic research in the field of literature, one can try to turn its late arrival to the debate into an advantage: let us employ some of the freedom regained from previous arguments on artistic research in other fields. In this contribution, I wish to put forward a few ideas concerning some possibilities for research in literature by comparing it with other, more established fields of artistic research.

To reflect on practice-based methodologies, I borrow terms from the discussion of iconology such as verbal images, as well as mechanisms active in the psychology of recognising images: aspect seeing, experiments from perception, operations with images in language, and the collision between image and text. Aspect seeing in particular, I suggest, could be used as a powerful tool for developing methodologies where autonomous writing (literary texts) and written analysis, reflection, and research create intelligent interaction. The literary critic Ezra Pound contributes his valuable concept of 'poetic charge' to this discussion.²

Aspect seeing is concerned with possible interpretations. Aspect change reveals different possible meanings. The switch between different aspects results in the understanding of a work (image, concept, thought, experience) on several levels. For all artworks, it holds that these interpretations are potentially unlimited in scope, open to subjectivity and personal undertones. Using words for making art means re-using words, which have been in others people's mouths before. Language is a shared practice. Literature is at the forefront of the modification and development of language. Literature is the shadow that language casts on our habits; it mirrors the changes of language—literature pushes its borders.

Words in Visual Arts

As a practitioner of language-based art, I have participated in the early discussions in the Netherlands on 'third cycle' studies in the arts early on.³ Since my first attempts, as of 2003, to establish fruitful methodologies between artistic practice and education at Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, and academic studies and research at the University of Amsterdam, I have witnessed a

² Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934). London: Faber and Faber, 1951.

³ For example, I participated in "The Third Cycle: Artistic Research after Bologna," Conference, 10–11 October 2007, Felix Meritis Centre, Amsterdam. For more see: <http://www.ahk.nl/en/research-groups/art-theory-and-research/conferences/>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

remarkable process of transformation: the initial refusal to connect artistic and academic (i.e. writing) methodologies in institutional formats has yielded to valuable collaboration between the two institutes. The University of Amsterdam now offers an MA programme in Artistic Research and, together with the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, the transdisciplinary Honours Programme Art and Research, which was developed in 2006.

Over the same period, the status of written language as sole material in visual arts and of writing as an autonomous means of expression has changed as well. In some areas of visual art, written language gained its autonomous status via materialisation, such as in conceptual art's use of writing in forms of spatial and graphic presentation, or when making books become an independent genre of the visual arts.⁴ But conceptual art is not literature, and writing by artists is not (quite) literature either. Throughout the last decade, more and more visual artists have published novels. First studies have now been made of artists' writing and its qualities and shortcomings.⁵ Nowadays, literary writing should gain adequate status in the field of artistic research in its own right: writers—not only visual artists who happen to write—should have access to an adequately improved infrastructure of doing third cycle research.

Literature needs no other material than written language to exist. Literary production gains its impact solely from the printed word, detached from its particular visual appearance. Nevertheless, literature is—as all art forms—concerned with images, and literary writing can be called a particular form of using verbal imagery.⁶ We remember that the Linguistic Turn preceded the Pictorial Turn and that the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has taught us to pay attention to the language games we play as well as to the images we recognise and produce by using language.⁷ Text is first-rate material for both creating verbal imagery *and* for letting language do the work of reflecting on it. Words and sentences are—in our language habits—unexpectedly packed with metaphorical expression.

4 Ulises Carrión, "The New Art of Making Books" (1975), in: *Ulises Carrión: We Have Won! Haven't We?*, ed. by Guy Schraenen. Amsterdam: Museum Fodor, 1992, pp. 53–54.

5 Ilse Van Rijn, *The Artists' Text as Work of Art*, dissertation. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities, 2017.

6 Cf. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

7 Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. New York, NY: Macmillan, 1953.

Images in Language

The American language philosopher Benjamin Lee Whorf has pointed out poignantly how little we can say without metaphors. Whorf claimed that nearly *all* linguistic instruments we use on a day-to-day basis rely on metaphorical transfer and non-linguistic experiences (such as shared bodily experiences or certain shared physical and perceptive set-ups).⁸ The philosopher and writer Fritz Mauthner argued that:

It is impossible to arrest the conceptual content of words permanently. Therefore knowledge of the world through language is impossible. It is possible to arrest the *motive* content of words. Therefore art is possible through language, verbal art, poetry.⁹

The philosophers Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin fortified the *imageness* of language by claiming that “language is essentially metaphorical.”¹⁰ Literature is made of language—yet it augments its own conventions in a complex texture of what is said *indirectly*, *how* it is said and even what has been left *unsaid*.

On one side, written language as plain everyday language is made to *communicate* operational matters for enabling smooth interaction with others in the world. Its *aim* is reached when the *meaning* has come across, or the other responds as one intended. The language philosopher Rudi Keller argues that “language is wanting to influence.”¹¹ Academic writing, we may say, aims to communicate the chain of thoughts in an argument.

On the other side sits a poetic language with a manifold of less pragmatic but more complex mastery. I believe that for a discourse on artistic research in literature, the notion of poetic charge should be taken into consideration. Ezra Pound introduced the concept of poetic charge into the classification of literature. Literature is “language charged with meaning,”¹² he claimed, and

8 Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956, pp. 145–146.

9 Quoted from: Allan Janik/Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1973). Chicago, IL: Elephant Paperbacks, 1996, p. 129 [emphasis mine]. Cf. Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Zweite, überarbeitete Auflage*. Erster Band: *Zur Sprache und zur Psychologie* (1906). Frankfurt am Main et al.: Ullstein, 1982, p. 97.

10 Janik/Toulmin (1996), *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, p. 128.

11 Rudi Keller, *Sprachwandel: Von der unsichtbaren Hand in der Sprache*. Tübingen, Basel: UTB Francke, 1994, p. 20.

12 Pound (1951), *ABC of Reading*, p. 28.

“great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.”¹³ However controversially Pound’s work has been debated, his notion of poetic charge is of great value in discussing possibilities and establishing artistic research in literature.

Poetic Charge

How does this concept prepare us for useful artistic research in literary practice? Where can we see and understand the differences between (just) language and (good) literature? According to Pound the degree of poetic charge helps to define the difference between language and literature. The degree of poetic charge thus defines the degree of ‘literariness,’ maybe even its value.

With regard to words and literature, the degree of charge is measured in the currency of meaning. Currency, like current itself, speaks of a flow—a stream of values and ideas. The charged object holds possible meanings. It is a container for accumulated potential directions of meaning and aspect. Similar to a metaphor, or to any image in language, its possible meanings are stored and need to be recuperated, harvested, or discovered. Pound sketches just three possible ways to stuff the charge into language, namely:

[P]hanopoeia, melopoeia, logopoeia. You use a word to throw a visual image on to the reader’s imagination, or you charge it by sound, or you use groups of words to do this. Thirdly, you take the greater risk of using the word in some special relation to ‘usage’, that is, to the kind of context in which the reader expects, or is accustomed, to find it.¹⁴

In the contemporary discourse on poetry and its reciprocal relationship to mental processes, the literary critic Raoul Schrott (together with neuroscientist Arthur Jacobs) based his claim partly on a continuation of this poetic charge established by Pound.¹⁵ Each successful metaphor, every *aspect* of the qualities of every single word, syntax, and rhythm and every detail that turns interpretation of a piece of text into *meaning* owes its load and puissance to its level of poetic charge. Pound’s metaphor of a *charge* of a word excellently connects the notion of *current* (from physics as in electrical charge), *currency*

13 Pound (1951), *ABC of Reading*, p. 27.

14 Pound (1951), *ABC of Reading*, p. 37.

15 Arthur Jacobs/Raoul Schrott, *Gehirn und Gedicht: Wie wir unsere Wirklichkeiten konstruieren*. Munich: Carl Hanser, 2011, p. 484.

(as in value of exchanging goods and meaning) and transport (as in *loaded* by meaning). It is a good example of showing the aspects of a word in practice. At the same time, the *level* of poetic charge brings us to the main claim of literature as a very suitable discipline for conducting artistic research. The extreme form of poetically charged language, distilled as poetry, has not one but many meanings. However, literary disciplines such as prose and poetry do also consciously operate with the poetic charge of single words and their syntax correlates with one another. If “good literature is language charged with meaning to an utmost degree,”¹⁶ artistic research in literature must discuss, identify, and courageously wire this poetic charge.

The process of unloading the text from its poetic charge is based on mechanisms of aspect seeing. Aspect seeing is a concept which has been popularised—if not introduced in the philosophy of language—by Ludwig Wittgenstein.¹⁷ To do so, one needs to understand that the peeled layers are singular aspects of the words and sentences. Aspect seeing and poetic charge are directly related to each other: simply put, several aspects can *hide* within one verbal expression. Depending on the particular sentence, a manifold of different meanings can be captured simultaneously; *unpacking* them is part of the interpretation. Carefully unfolding the layers and tracing them (also in written form) is part of literary critique: wiring the text, searching the poetic freight, and *saying* what the possible meanings are. However, this operation can also be spelled out in the literary text itself. In this sense, artistic research finds its climax in literature. Being the author of the material and *showing* through firsthand autonomous writing where the seams are is more than critique. The seams reveal locations of aspect change, the transfers from understanding, and what constitutes (good) literature.

Aspect Seeing

We are all fluent in aspect seeing (most of the time we do it unawares). Every punchline is dependent on aspect change. Often in a joke, a word or an expression has several specific meanings in different contexts. The discovery of the *other* contexts produces the shift in meaning and with it the surprised laugh. But the ‘understanding’ of an expression, which uses metaphorical rather than analytical descriptive texts, requires the mechanisms of aspect seeing. Aspect

16 Pound (1951), *ABC of Reading*, p. 27.

17 Cf. Wittgenstein (1953), *Philosophical Investigations*.

seeing displays unexpected meanings. It is a core mental action, which allows us to match and sort (visual) perceptions and to compare contexts in which non-visual verbal patterns of meaning occur. In order to understand the concept of aspect seeing and aspect change in the arts and its important role in artistic research in literature, a brief summary of these correlations will be provided.

What is aspect seeing? It is the moment of discovering another meaning in something. It is the sudden awareness of a *second image* occurring from a visual or verbal sign. It is the *aha moment* of seeing another signification—getting the joke. The most rudimentary examples are visual displays of gestalt psychological icons such as the rabbit-duck illusion.¹⁸ Do not dismiss it just because it looks like a simple game. The mechanism of aspect change is elementary in the finest and most subtle interpretations of artworks, in visual art, literature, and music. Aspect seeing is the core principle of the “capacity to see something *as something*”¹⁹—understanding beyond plain and literal meaning, and thus interpreting and understanding art.

In short, aspect seeing is an essential plug-in in our processing of the world and an essential tool for making and discussing art in general. However, it turns out that so far mostly only scholars familiar with Wittgenstein make use of this term. One aim of this contribution is to make the term and its valuable realm accessible and to introduce it into the discourse of art and artistic research. Another aim is to test it with regard to setting up a practice-based methodology for artistic research in literature. Current trans-disciplinary research in the overlapping fields of artistic practice and cognitive sciences profits from the understanding of perception as a *productive* (rather than passive) mental process. The contemporary study of interpretation conceptualises the sensual processes involved in the arts—especially seeing and hearing—as active poetic interaction between the work and the audience or perceiver.²⁰

Aspect change reveals what one sees or discovers in an image, whether it is optically or mentally visible. Perception is an active process. Seeing is “action in perception,”²¹ and *seeing* is a metaphor for understanding an image,

18 Based on Joseph Jastrow's illustration: Joseph Jastrow, “The Mind's Eye,” in: *Popular Science Monthly* 54 (1899), pp. 299–312, and “Kaninchen und Ente,” in: *Fliegende Blätter* (1892). Cf. also: Wittgenstein (1953), *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 194.

19 Wittgenstein (1953), *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 213 [emphasis mine].

20 Cf. Jacobs/Schrott (2011), *Gehirn und Gedicht*.

21 Alva Nöe, *Action in Perception* (2004). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

even when created by verbal language. The sharing of the details one spectator or reader has discovered enriches the perspective of the other. Critique of artworks is based on the belief that sharing the aspects one has discovered enlarges the spectrum of meaning inherent to an image, a piece of music, a text, or other art forms. One *aspect* is a part of the *spectrum* of possible meanings.

How should artistic research in literature be written? The presence of texts by critics and scientists—which are in beauty, aptitude, and attitude comparable to the literature they examine—makes it particularly hard to identify the exact seam between autonomous and discursive texts. Yet, this issue has been addressed within literary criticism by scholars and leans against some of the complaints put forward by Ezra Pound along with his daring set of criteria for classifying “good literature.”²² In literature, artistic research should be supported when it hosts a reflection upon what could be arguably called good literature. There are ways to point out the value of literary texts. And there are ways to identify the writers whose practices invite reflection *outside* of autonomous texts and who display genuine interest in unriddling and carefully observing the artistic processes involved—their own or otherwise. This knowledge could or should be applied to the young generation of artistic research in literary fields.

Saying vs Showing

Autonomous writing takes advantages of first-level writing (informative, as a messenger, descriptive, analytical, academic), which we could call modes of *saying*, and transforms it into second-level writing (poetic, metaphorical, constructed, indirect, inventive), which in turn operates within modes of *showing*. This *saying-showing* dichotomy we owe again to Wittgenstein; Janik and Toulmin put it like this:

Much of the difficulty that people have experienced in interpreting the *Tractatus* [*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1921] revolves around the fact that both ethics and logic relate to what can be ‘shown’ but not ‘said’ . . . In the first place, it refers to what the world has in common with its representation, its mirror, that is, language. Secondly, it refers to the

22 Pound (1934), *ABC of Reading*, p. 39.

poetic power of language to convey the ‘meaning of life.’ Language can represent experience, but it can also infuse experience with meaning.²³

It is this transformation of (any artistic language) material, which elevates a text from merely instructive, descriptive, informative, or authoritative into a kind of transmitter of poetic, surprising, or experiential meaning. The awareness and exploration of such mechanisms are crucial for the artistic autonomy of a writer-researcher. Especially in the context of ‘third cycle’ artistic research, the examination and reflection of one’s own artistic literary production will have to deal with the differences between both textual modes: autonomous poetic writing (*showing*) and reflection on such textual production (*saying*). Awareness of the saying-showing dichotomy offers itself as a potent method to find better, more sovereign ways of reflecting on literary production from the perspective of one also practising autonomous writing.

But how exactly should one employ the saying-showing dichotomy in artistic research writing practice? How should one experience and train for aspect seeing? For literary work, the colliding parts—discursive text and literary autonomous text—are not as easy to distinguish as when image and text meet. In the collision between image and text, such change can be demonstrated step by step, as we know from the ‘Lambregts Method’ based on work by the Dutch artist Lambertus Lambregts.²⁴

The ‘Lambregts Method’ can act as a display of aspect change in simple terms: an image is subtitled with different texts, which contribute to a shift in the aspects we can detect in the image. Within the methodology for conducting artistic research in literature, the actual visual image is replaced by autonomous text. This swap is based on the saying-showing distinction by Wittgenstein. Literature is an art form, it *shows*. Literature has this in common with other art forms. Looking into the capacity of seeing aspects—first from image in collision with text, later ideally in transfer from autonomous literary writing with reflexive text—could be used as a methodology for artistic research in literature. In the book *Het extragegeven*, Lambregts repeats this image on every second page, accompanied by a single sentence on the facing page:

23 Janik/Toulmin (1996), *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, p. 139.

24 Lambertus Lambregts, *Het extragegeven*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Harmonie, 1974.



FIG. 13.1 Lambertus Lambregts, *Het extragegeven*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Harmonie, 1974.

policeman and man | policeman with man | policeman with arrestee |
 policeman with man, who complains | policeman passing by a bystander
 | man passing by a policeman | policeman with detective | policeman and
 his brother | father and son | “come to the car.” | “would you come with me
 to the car?” | “have you been to the hairdresser?” | “may I make a call to the
 business?” | dead trees | “irovdja norc, ilye mrozhec!”²⁵

²⁵ My translation.

Artistic Research in Literature

How can these references help to construct productive research methodologies for practice-based reflection on literature? What is their use for 'third cycle' research in literature? Generally, as in other artistic disciplines, an artist with a PhD does not guarantee better artworks regarding autonomous quality. No productive and confident writer needs to conduct artistic research on literature to improve his or her output or to decorate his or her practice with a 'third cycle' academic degree. In the past few decades, the discussion of practice-based research in the arts has been overhauled thoroughly: an artist's confidence or his or her oeuvre does not have to be upvalued by scientific methods nor should it be influenced by academic analysis.

Artistic research involving written work can create a special situation when the field of arts under scrutiny is literature. Writing *and* reflection on writing literary texts both take place in writing and threaten (or promise) to become self-reflective. Language itself can be described by language only by being self-reflective. Language is a host for our imagination and images associated with our perception and interpretation. Some of these processes are based on what Wittgenstein called the language game. Language games involve the awareness of a plurality of contexts and influences into which words are exposed when formulated into a meaningful expression, utterance. Literature is the high point of watching language games in action. Exposing one's literature to a mode of reflection, critique, and analysis could be a fine and adventurous enterprise. Being able to host the notions of aspect change elegantly, saying-showing and speech acts within one's work could help deliver mature and independent reflection. Authors of literary works often are surprised to hear readers' interpretations that absolutely make sense and chime with the author's opinion, yet s/he has not willingly "put it into the text."²⁶ In other words, the reader (or viewer)—although not the maker of the work—is a qualified interpreter of or partaker in it. After finishing a work, an author (of most genres, not only literature) is both the producer and receptor of a work. Into the gap between reader/viewer and author, I aim to slip aspect seeing as a methodological tool.

The understanding of aspect seeing and poetic charge as proper tools for writing and thinking about literature is a truly sensational position for conducting artistic research. Again, no good writer's work should need to undergo

26 Juli Zeh, *Treideln, Frankfurter Poetikvorlesungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Schöffling und Co., 2013, p. 172.

such research for any other reason than pure interest in one's own (subconscious) operations. Spelling out the poetic charge ruins the joke. Displaying all aspects explains the punchline. But in no field of art, can writing take over both modes as naturally as in literature: autonomous writing and discursive writing can be developed into a unique interplay between those two modes—saying and showing.

Aspect seeing is discovering the construction. Aspect seeing is seeing not only *what* is shown, described, or depicted but revealing *how* the construction of the image is made. This aligns with the more general question of how writers write. In my opinion, artistic research in literature is a promising possibility of gaining insight into writers' progression. There are a great many ways of writing, yet, in the context of artistic research in literature, the reports from the writing desk become most pressing. Some publications by authors *about* their creative writing have given vivid insights into the practice of choosing and ordering words to create a whole image. The *Frankfurter Literaturvorlesungen* and other hybrid formats on authors and authorship have a long tradition. In her lecture on poetic strategies, Juli Zeh provided an insight into some writers' conditions such as dealing and struggling with daily routines and readiness for the 'real' work.²⁷ Franz Kafka was a forerunner in revealing such issues, as we know. When to write? How to resist distraction and self-doubt? How to prepare the 'subject,' material, and the plot, or how to avoid it? How to include variations in the work? In literature, like in other art forms, the relationship between author and work remains precarious. Writing can go wrong with every added word. Every sentence is a new beginning. Failure looms at the beginning of every sentence. After every full stop, every comma, a clause can invert the meaning of the preceding words. Writing is dangerous: it relates time and word, breath and sentence. This particular condition of writing is (perhaps comparable with the act of composing musical scores) an important focal point of artistic research in literature. Similar to the experiences of being inside *and* outside of a text (as the literary artist conducting artistic research), oscillating to and fro between production and perception/reflection, a writer can tell us about the processes of writing and writing *about*.

The call for artistic research in literature thus relates to the possibilities of reflecting on the practice of writing. But the possibility of artistic research in literature promises to go beyond discursive qualities. The relationship between

27 Zeh (2013), *Treideln*, pp. 78–79.

autonomous and reflexive text can be woven together much tighter than in any other field of the arts. Language games could be used as a tool so that the creation of aspect change can be organised at a high frequency.

Outlook

At the moment it is essential to try to foresee which chances will bring about artistic research in literature and what the possible obstacles to this might be. These questions shift their focus from the work itself to the author and back again. Artistic research in literature can be a chance to gain insight into very delicate and utterly precise shifts in meaning. A slowed down focus on the transfer of sense through images in language and close investigation of how to write (and read) autonomous texts are possible ways for artists and their audience to become aware of the changing aspects of making utterances. Artistic research in literature could produce a laboratory for (metaphorical) meanings and pure ways of writing—beyond using language merely as a vehicle.

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Models and Precursors



Who's Peaked? Chris Kraus's Writing Performances as a Case Study for Twenty-First Century Writing Culture

Anneleen Masschelein

Abstract:

In recent years, the work of Chris Kraus has crossed over from an avant-garde art circuit into mainstream literature. The self-reflexive stance and the strategies that she deploys to relate her own story to a broader intellectual and political context are reminiscent of certain tendencies in the Anglo-Saxon field of creative writing, but they mark her work first and foremost as an artistic research and performance. Kraus at the same time performs writing as an ongoing practice while revealing the writer as a simulacrum. In so doing, she formulates a strong critique of the male-dominated, capitalist worlds of art and theory at the end of the 20th century but also offers a model for an alternative female subjectivity that is complex, fragmented, and fascinating.

Anglo-Saxon Creative Writing in the Twenty-First Century

Today, creative writing in the Anglo-Saxon world and increasingly in other parts of the world is a complex phenomenon best considered from the vantage point of three different realms: the university, popular writing culture, and the art world.

In general, the three domains can be related to distinct models of creative writing. MFA programmes in creative writing sponsor a range from high- to middlebrow fiction with a strong realist tendency, to more experimental post-modern writing.

The literary advice industry, by contrast, caters to a professional writing circuit associated with popular literature or genre fiction. Creative writing in this sense mostly focuses on specific genres that are considered lucrative, like romance, detective, or young adult fiction, and handbooks outline both the rules of the genre and the customs of the literary profession (how to approach an agent, address a publisher, etc.). A specific type of literary advice that came into being in the 1930s and today has developed into one of the most successful and respected subgenres is the combination of writing manual and self-help. In general, handbooks tend to have a bad reputation for being commercial for

perpetually rehashing the same advice and mantras—‘Write what you know,’ ‘Show, don’t tell,’ and ‘Find your own voice.’ Nevertheless, handbooks can help aspiring young writers, and particularly ‘writer’s memoirs’ combining advice with information about a certain ‘literary lifestyle’ remain very popular today.

Most interesting in the context of artistic research is a third type of creative writing, which is fostered by the art world and can be captured as ‘performative writing’ embedded within interdisciplinary artistic practices.¹ Today, more and more art schools are offering programmes in writing that not only entail writing about art (i.e. art criticism) but also writing as an artistic practice, often in combination with other media practices.² Within this field, the influence of (French) Theory, that was huge in literary departments in the 1970s and 1980s, but much less in academic creative writing, cannot be underestimated. The enthusiastic reception by American visual artists, writers, performance artists, and filmmakers led to an interesting transformation of theory into a conceptual practice in the artistic sense.

In what follows, I want to explore one of the most remarkable cases of creative writing as artistic research: Chris Kraus, whose work is extraordinary for many reasons. First of all, as the editor of *Semiotext(e)*, the leading publisher of (French) Theory until today, she played a crucial role in the introduction of French theory in the States, even though that role has not always been visible and remains under-examined.³ Secondly, starting out as a performance artist and experimental filmmaker, she turned to a form of auto-fictional writing that may seem confessional and voyeuristic at first sight, but that is, in fact, best understood as performance art within the medium of writing. Thirdly, in recent years, Kraus’s work has achieved unexpected cult status for a vast audience, thanks to a shift in the position of her work that may be related to aspects of the three creative writing traditions outlined above.

1 Cf. Suze Adams, “Practice as Research: A Fine Arts Contextual Study,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 13:3 (2014), pp. 218–226.

2 In Europe, creative writing as part of artistic research programmes is still in the very early stages, as Caduff points out, but in the Anglo-Saxon world, writing courses and workshops by and for artists have been offered in institutions like CalArts, Goldsmiths, the European Graduate School, to name but a few, since the 1990s, although not always in an institutionalised manner. Cf. Corina Caduff et al., eds, *Art and Artistic Research*, Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010.

3 For example, although Anaël Lejeune et al., eds., *French Theory and American Art*. Brussels: (SIC) and Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013, pay a lot of attention to the role of *Semiotext(e)* and include a text by Lotringer, Kraus is not mentioned at all.

The 'Case' of Chris Kraus

In the 2010s, the oeuvre of American author, editor, filmmaker, and performer Chris Kraus has been (re-)discovered, not just in the US but also in Europe. In the slipstream of re-editions and translations of Kraus's first novel *I Love Dick* (1997), and of an Amazon series made by Jill Soloway based on the novel and Kraus's persona (2016), the catchy title of that first book started appearing on T-shirts, tote bags, and Instagram. Meanwhile, Kraus is often cited as one of the defining authors of the millennium by writers and artists like Sheila Heti, Rachel Kushner, Rick Moody, Lena Dunham, McKenzie Wark, Carolee Schneeman, and Eileen Myles. In the UK, a first book devoted to her work consisted of essays and artistic interventions, including two videos and one recording, and resulted from a symposium devoted to Kraus's work hosted by the programme of Critical Writing on Art and Design at the Royal Academy of the Arts in London.⁴

Kraus's sudden rise to fame in her late fifties, early sixties is somewhat surprising. Sometimes perceived as narcissistic, navel-gazing, over-theoretical, and over-sexual, her first three auto-fictional novels, *I love Dick*, *Aliens & Anorexia* (2000) and *Torpor* (2006) are painstaking recordings of her professional and romantic failures and a search for an identity as a "smart girl," "dumb cunt," "hag" or "Kike" in the male-dominated, intertwined worlds of art and theory in New York and Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s. Quite remarkably, by now, Kraus almost seems to have overshadowed her former husband Sylvère Lotringer, the founder of the journal and publishing house *Semiotext(e)*, that she still runs with him and Hedi El Kholti. These days, she is definitely "peaking":

Who's Peaked? was a favorite guessing game among Jerome's new Berlin friends. (They also played it in London, New York and Paris.) Just as the Inuit had 33 words to describe different qualities of snow, Jerome and his friends enjoyed infinitely parsing different qualities of fame. Most of them agreed that fame was best arrived at through a slow and steady build. Global media-culture had produced an instant form of fame that was short-lived and arbitrary. Therefore, Jerome and all his friends agreed, it was much better for the artist to crossover from the underground in the mainstream culture after his *third* independent movie, her *fourth* one-person show. In this way, once the initial hype played out, there

4 Mira Mattar, ed., *You Must Make your Death Public. A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*. London, Berlin: Mute Books, 2015.

would still be hidden aspects of the biography and work for critics to discover.⁵

Jerome Shafir, one of the protagonists in *Torpor*, Kraus's third novel about an intellectual couple that tries to save their failing marriage by halfheartedly attempting to adopt a child, bears a strong resemblance to Sylvère Lotringer, about whom we already learned a great deal from the previous two books. Likewise, Shafir's wife Sylvie Green can be regarded as an alter ego of Chris, the I-protagonist of the two first books. Since Kraus has said that she has no talent for making things up,⁶ one of the genre labels suggested for her work is "theoretical fiction."⁷ Kraus herself uses terms like 'Case Study,' 'Lonely Girl Phenomenology,' and 'Project.' Moreover, from an artistic research perspective, her work can be perceived as an artistic project or performance. It brings together many different art forms and experiences, such as performance (she followed workshops with performance theorists Richard Schechner but also worked as a stripper), experimental film, French Theory, art criticism and teaching in art schools, and the New York literary scene of the 1980s and 1990s. She created a venue in the *Semiotext(e)* series "Native Agents," which presents an extremely interesting selection of American poets, performers, and artists from various New York scenes, such as Cookie Mueller, Kathy Acker, David Rattray, Eileen Myles, David Wojnarowicz, and Bob Flanagan.⁸

Kraus herself emerged from Saint Mark's Poetry Project, the same scene as Patti Smith, although a decade later.⁹ Compared to the lyrical, romantic

5 Chris Kraus, *Torpor* (2006). London: Tuskar Rock Press, 2017, p. 154.

6 Rachel Cooke, "Novelist Chris Kraus: Who Hasn't Had an Affair?," in: *The Guardian*, 30 Apr. 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/30/chris-kraus-ive-never-had-much-talent-for-making-things-up-i-love-dick-interview>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018. At the same time, true to her autofictional stance, Kraus recently also called herself "such a fabulator." ("The Revival of Chris Kraus and Her Radical Novel *I Love Dick*," in: *Sleek*, 5 May 2017, <http://www.sleek-mag.com/2017/05/05/chris-kraus-interview-i-love-dick/>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.)

7 Joan Hawkins, "Theoretical Fictions," in: Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2006, pp. 263–276.

8 For sources that document the history of the project from an inside perspective cf. Chris Kraus/Sylvère Lotringer, "Introduction to the History of Semiotext(e)," in: Kraus/Lotringer, eds., *Hatred of Capitalism. A Semiotext(e) Reader*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001, pp. 13–24; Sylvère Lotringer, "My 80s. Better than Life," in: *Artforum International* 41 (2003), pp. 194–197 and pp. 252–253; Sylvère Lotringer, "American Beginnings," in: Lejeune et al., eds. (2013), *French Theory*, pp. 44–76; and David Morris, "Kraus Uncut. On Semiotext(e), Disclosure and Not-Knowing," in: Mattar, ed. (2015), *Death Public*, pp. 107–118.

9 In the 1980s, Kraus edited a performance series for Saint Marks. Cf. Miles Champion, "Insane Podium: A Short History. The Poetry Podium, 1966–2012," 2012, <https://www.poetryproject.org/about/history/>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

tone of Smith's bestselling memoir *Just Kids*, Kraus's account of the New York post-punk art world is extremely candid.¹⁰ In her work punk, art, theory, art criticism, and feminism are intertwined in a unique mixture. She blends sentimental, 'bourgeois,' and feminine genres like the epistolary novel, memoir, and coming-of-age story with a disenchanting, critical portrait of intellectuals in a period of global crisis and neoliberal triumph that remains recognizable today. Revolutionary philosophers, artists, and pop musicians are revealed to be hustlers, old school male-chauvinist dicks and not so wealthy, lonely, and unhappy people. Women especially, if they are not particularly beautiful and/or young, but intelligent and quirky like Chris, remain caught up in poverty, exploitation, or invisibility, even at a time of feminism and Women's Liberation. From today's point of view, however, Kraus manages to offer a topical example for a new feminism in the still male-dominated art and media world. For despite the sense of failure, disenchantment, and despair, Kraus's novels are undeniably cool, funny, complex, fascinating, and impressive, as is Kraus herself.

The Editor as Performance Artist

At first sight, the overarching narrative in Kraus's first three books could be construed as one of 'finding her own voice,' one of the worn-out adagios of American style literary advice. In fact, it is perhaps more accurate to see it as a gradual shift from the invisible positions of editor and director to writer-protagonist-performer. The first book, *I Love Dick*, is an epistolary novel that starts as a joint 'project' by Kraus and Lotringer after 39-year-old Chris Kraus falls madly in love with theorist Dick Hebdige during a boozy dinner at his house. When she tells this to her husband, he proposes that the two of them each write letters to Dick in a kind of game, influenced by bourgeois literary examples like Pierre Choderlos de Laclos and Gustave Flaubert. However, for Kraus the letters are serious: she *really* loves Dick. More and more, she reconceives the project as a "case study," but not in the psychoanalytic sense of a study of female crisis or madness. As she points out in "Add it up"—a long chapter in the form of a list, interspersed with stories and notes on

10 Patti Smith, *Just Kids*. New York, NY: Ecco, 2010. On Kraus's disenchanting portrait of New York, see McKenzie Wark, "Fur and Trembling," in: Chris Kraus, *Torpor*. London: Tuskar Rock Press, 2017, pp. 274–292. On the notion of 'candor' in the work of Kraus, see Karolin Meunier, "Speaking Candour," in: Mira Mattar, ed., *You Must Make your Death Public. A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*. London, Berlin: Mute Books, 2015, pp. 75–86.

schizophrenia—it is a more impersonal case that links her experiences to that of other women and a general cultural condition. In an introduction to the second edition of *I Love Dick*, poet Eileen Myles calls Kraus's case study “a philosophical achievement,” as “she's turned female abjection inside out and aimed it at a man.”¹¹

Indeed, in the course of the book, the sense of failure and crisis that Chris experiences turns into a different kind of case, a court case or process, as is signalled by the frequent use of the header “Exhibit A, B, C . . .” All the letters, the recordings of phone calls and conversations, the diary entries are pieces of evidence (that in fact exist in the *Semiotext(e)* archive¹²). What they reveal, beyond the fact that things ‘really’ happened, is the meticulous build-up of an accusation, a complaint against the fact that, as Dick points out to Chris: “Men still do ruin women's life.”¹³ That this realisation is not merely personal but structural is emphasised through the many other stories that are inserted in the narrative. There is, for example, Hannah Wilke, whose former partner Claes Oldenburg tried to literally remove her from his life and biography. And there is the solemn accusation of Richard Schechner, the performance theorist whose irresponsible behaviour as a workshop teacher verges on abuse.

In the second part of the book, “Every letter is a love letter,” a shift occurs, and the dialogue with Sylvère through Dick turns into a diary form, in which Dick becomes DD, suggesting a coming of age of Chris as a writer and a possible happy romantic ending. Through the impersonal address of a diary needed as a stimulus to write, and through all the different tales and fragments, Chris (re-)discovers the use of the ‘I,’ her voice as a writer that was in fact there all along, long before she met either Sylvère or Dick.

It was as if I was right back there in this room in East 11th Street, all those pages of notes that I was writing then, tiny ballpoint letters on wrinkly onion paper about George Elliot, diagrams of molecular movement and attraction, Ulrike Meinhof and Merleau-Ponty. I believed I was inventing a new genre and it was secret because there was nobody to tell it to. Lonely Girl phenomenology.¹⁴

11 Eileen Myles, “What About Chris?,” in: Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2006, pp. 13–15; here p. 15.

12 David Morris, “Kraus Uncut. On Semiotext(e), Disclosure and Not-Knowing,” in: Mira Mattar, ed., *You Must Make your Death Public. A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*. London, Berlin: Mute Books, 2015, pp. 107–118; here p. 110.

13 Kraus (2006), *I Love Dick*, p. 172.

14 Kraus (2006), *I Love Dick*, p. 137.

According to Hawkins, using the 'T' only works when Kraus learns to switch between different subject positions.¹⁵ Inserting increasingly long and substantial reflections on artists and artworks leads her to find a voice as an art critic and to establish a method for approaching art. This is based on a far-reaching form of identification with the subjects that she is talking about, such as Wilke, R. B. Kitaj, or David Rattray.¹⁶

Something similar happens in *Aliens & Anorexia*, where the figures of Simone Weil and Paul Thek become living presences that fundamentally shape her artistic practice, most clearly the film *Gravity and Grace* (1996), named after Simone Weil's book, as well as her life. Moreover, at the end of the book, the film itself is described in a curious mixture of narrative and dramatisation that not just summarises it, but re-enacts it. In this way, the traditional practice of ekphrasis becomes a performance as well as a transition to fiction: if *Gravity and Grace* failed as a film, it is preserved in and as a story. Similarly, in *Torpor*, many descriptions of Sylvie Green's photographs can be found, as if in the catalogue for an imaginary exhibition, even though no images are included.¹⁷

A variation of this is found in *I Love Dick*, where Chris cites from her second, not yet existing book, *Aliens & Anorexia*, but attributes the book to Dick.¹⁸ Thus, when Chris remarks: "You write about art so well," the statement is more complex than a compliment to her object of infatuation. It suggests a sense of self-love that the narrator-editor will discover belatedly that strongly contrasts with the low self-esteem that dominates the trilogy. Through Dick, Chris has discovered herself, both as a writer and as a lover. Not a lover in the sense of the romance novel, though, but in the Barthesian sense, as someone who performs the lover's figures, to the point of abjection.¹⁹ In so doing Kraus disturbs the gender roles inherent in the Western culture of love, and manages to take on another role that is usually associated with masculinity, that of the critic

15 Hawkins (2006), *Theoretical Fictions*, pp. 272–273.

16 This method is also deployed in Kraus's art criticism and in her most recent biography of Kathy Acker. See Linda Stupart, "Against Critical Distance: Chris Kraus and the Empathetic Exchange of Objects," in: Mira Mattar, ed., *You Must Make your Death Public. A Collection of Texts and Media on the Work of Chris Kraus*. London, Berlin: Mute Books, 2015, pp. 87–102.

17 In the new edition of *Aliens & Anorexia* two stills from the movie can be found on the cover and the first page. See Chris Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia* (2000). Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2013.

18 Hawkins (2006), *Theoretical Fictions*, p. 272.

19 In *A Lover's Discourse* Roland Barthes famously listed a number of figures that capture the lover's behaviour, merging Western culture (opera, literature) with personal experience. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments*, translated by Richard Howard. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2010.

and artist, but explicitly as an amateur, a lover who understands art through empathy. When Kraus writes about art or herself, she reenacts and performs it in writing.

However, the story ends in a twist that undermines an all-too romantic happy end. In Los Angeles, Chris reconnects with Dick and has a brief fling with him, after which he turns out to be a ‘real dick.’ When Dick finally replies in writing, he does not even address Chris as a person. Instead, he writes a letter to Sylvère, in which he misspells her name, and simply sends her a copy, that is included in the book.²⁰ The cruel negation of her as a human being, as a partner for dialogue, is mortifying but at the same time ridiculous, after the development and discoveries that have been made; and it once more confirms ‘the case’ that has been built up about the treatment of women in the art world.

As a result of the parataxical method of the narrator,²¹ all the stories, fragments, and scraps of evidence do not form a whole or lead to a happy end. There is no endpoint or final resolution in these stories, no lesson to be learnt or voice to be found. But like in a schizophrenic delirium, the oeuvre becomes alive as oeuvre: everything becomes meaningful and interlinked. In this sense, the long chapter on schizophrenia, “Add it up,” does not explain Kraus’s state of mind as a form of madness, but it explains her practice of art, thinking, and living. The writerly subject that is formed in the writing is a “schizo,” who embraces the contradictions of capitalism and the impossibility to say ‘I.’ “(For years I tried to write but the compromises of my life made it impossible to inhabit a position. And ‘who’ am I? Embracing you & failure’s changed all that ‘cause now I know I am no one. And there’s a lot to say ...).”²² This subjectivity that Chris discovers to be “no one” is no longer negatively marked by failure or negation, but is a condition of possibility. It holds a potential for the future that has already been actualised at the moment of writing, and is presented through the intensely imaginative method that marks her art criticism and writing. Reviewing and editing her own life is a form of reenactment and play, not an analysis or reflection.

20 Kraus (2006), *I Love Dick*, pp. 258–260.

21 In *Torpor*, Kraus explicitly discusses “parataxis” as “a strange literary form, born at the beginning of the Middle Ages,” which, “flashing back and sideways”, fractures “old familiar and heroic tales into contradictory, multiple perspectives” (Kraus, *Torpor* [2017], p. 70). In Kraus’s own work *parataxis* serves as a way of saving fragments and a form of writing alternate histories (cf. Wark [2017], *Fur and Trembling*, pp. 281–282). Parataxis in Kraus can also be related to other artistic procedures, like collage and montage, as employed by Sophie Calle, for example.

22 Kraus (2006), *I Love Dick*, p. 212.

Reframing the Writer as Simulacrum

Commenting on the revival of *I Love Dick*, in 2017, Kraus remarks that because of the complex, contradictory strategies of her novel its “political aspects . . . are overlooked in favour of its lifestyle aspects.”²³ These current interpretations are countered by the paratexts included in the new editions of the texts: long lists of praise for the books, prefaces by other writers, and interpretative essays after the texts, as well as cover photographs on the new editions of *I Love Dick* and *Aliens & Anorexia*. With her long expertise as an editor, Kraus must be fully aware of the reframing effects. The cover photograph of *I Love Dick*, for instance, is a still life of an open notebook with pen, an ashtray, and a cup, half lit, half in the shadow. The photograph, “Treilles, 1996,” was taken by Jean Baudrillard, one of *Semiotext(e)*'s star authors, famous for his theory of the logic of simulacrum in contemporary society. This representation of the paraphernalia of a contemporary writing culture—like other forms of late-capitalist popular culture—is marked by nostalgia for the analogue. However, combined with the name of Baudrillard as the photographer, it can also be read as a subtle hint that the traditional (male) writer is, in fact, a simulacrum. This interpretation is reinforced by Daniel Marlos's photograph on the back cover. It depicts Kraus, half hidden behind her hair, looking intently at two figurines, a bodybuilder in a vintage car (like the one Dick possesses in the book) and a woman in a wedding dress. Like an authorial narrator, Kraus looks down on her characters from above. The elements of play, manipulation, and self-irony captured in the authorial portrait undermine the truth-claims of the book as memoir.²⁴

Together, the two photographs point to a dimension of Kraus's work that is particularly relevant today, not just in the context of artistic research but of writing culture in general: the notion of writing as a way of recording and shaping your experiences in an ongoing, serial work of art, as a stylisation of life. Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan refer to Roland Barthes's last course on the preparation of the novel, and they show how in a recent wave of “novels of commission” the impulse to write, the project of a novel, can itself become the subject of novels.²⁵ These narratives take as their starting point the fact that a writer writes a book about writing a book.²⁶ It hardly seems a

23 Revival of Chris Kraus (2017).

24 For a discussion of this photograph see Michelle Weidman, “Citizenship, the Body, and the Ethics of Exposure,” in: *Art Practical* 8:1 (2016), <http://www.artpractical.com/feature/citizenship-the-body-and-the-ethics-of-exposure/>, date of access: 17 Sept. 2018.

25 Rachel Sagner Buurma/Laura Heffernan, “Notation after The Reality Effect: Remaking Reference with Sheila Heti and Roland Barthes,” in: *Representations* 125 (2014), pp. 80–102.

26 Examples of authors who have written novels of commission are Ben Lerner, Sheila Heti, Geoff Dyer, and Nell Stevens.

coincidence that Sheila Heti, one of Buurma's and Heffernan's cases in point, provided the following blurb for *Torpor*:

I know there was a time before I read Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* (in fact that time was only five years ago), but it's hard to imagine; some works of art do this to you. They tear down so many assumptions of what the form can handle (in this case, what the form of a novel can handle) that there is no way to recreate your mind before you encountered them.

In this quote, Heti captures the importance of Kraus's work as an artistic research in the field of creative writing. Departing from her story as a case study, or from mere auto-fiction, Kraus, in fact, transformed the form of the novel into something that cannot really be named but that profoundly changes what is possible in the field.

In Kraus's posture as it emerges in her work and persona, we thus see traces of different creative writing traditions converge. Although Kraus repeatedly emphasises that she is an autodidact, she did follow workshops (most notably that of Schechner), her work is highly self-reflexive, and she has taught artistic research at various institutions. Saint Marks and the New York art scene have shaped her writer-performer's stance. In her eclectic, voracious reading, she has also tended towards more popular, bourgeois genres, and the auto-fictional content of her work fits in with the memoir boom and the cultivation of a writerly lifestyle in popular culture. At the same time, a profound knowledge of French theory shapes her ironic, distanced, and critical stance. For Kraus, theory is a living tissue that connects everything, no matter how inconsistent, fragmentary, extremely personal, verging on gossip, or hybrid.

Having soaked up and absorbed all these influences, Kraus's position as writer can be regarded as a perfect simulacrum of the endlessly repeated rules of American creative writing culture: "Write what you know," "Show don't tell," and "Find your own voice." This simulacrum, from a specific feminine/queer position, functions as a complex 'schizo' machine against capitalism, patriarchy, and traditional literary genres and forms, as well as a unique art project that continues to fascinate new publics.

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Translation Laboratory: Oskar Pastior's Applied Translation Research

Thomas Strässle

Abstract:

In his intonations to a poem by Charles Baudelaire, which appeared in 2002 under the title *o du roher iasmin*, Oskar Pastior conducts a piece of applied translation research. He meets the challenges of literary translation, as they are most prominently shown in lyrics, in a translation laboratory in which, in 43 attempts, the different sides of the Baudelaire poem are set out and examined. The act of translating is methodically segmented and explored regarding its latitude, and it is systematically and polyperspectively put in reference to the many different aspects of the body of language. By serialising the individual attempts, the literary text gains an argumentative structure that makes it readable as artistic research: it produces aesthetic knowledge in artistic practice.

How should a poem be translated? Or more precisely: What aspects of it can be translated at all? The horizon of meaning it creates? The rhythm that carries it? The structures that determine it? The timbres that form its body of sound? The shape its letters create? Or none of these aspects? And therefore some entirely different aspects? Or preferably all of them and many more? The only certainty is that the problems that arise in the process of every literary translation are most prominent when dealing with lyrical texts.

Bertolt Brecht advised concentration. In a lyric-theoretical comment on the *translatability of poems*, he wrote: "Poems usually get damaged most strongly while being translated into another language through the effort of translating too much."¹ Instead, one should 'be content' with the translation of the writer's attitude towards language by imitating certain aspects of the work, "not more," as Brecht was swift to point out: "The occasion for this imitation must not necessarily be prescribed by the original."² Brecht's translation maxim does not

1 Bertolt Brecht, "Die Übersetzbarkeit von Gedichten" (1935), in: *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst 2* (= *Gesammelte Werke* 19), ed. by Suhrkamp in cooperation with Elisabeth Hauptmann. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967, p. 404.

2 Ibid.

only aim for the translation's autonomy of the original—the translation can never be a 'copy' of it—but also for a reduction of the means: one should not 'damage' a poem by trying to transfer 'too much'. Too much *at the same time*, as could be added, but one should, by implication, deliberately limit oneself when translating.

This provides the theoretical possibility of making use of a serial technique when translating literary texts. It counters the danger of 'too much' not by translating the poem in a singular act while dealing with as many aspects as possible, as it is usually done, but by undertaking several diverse attempts, each focussing on one very particular aspect at a time. One of the most convincing attempts to translate poetry follows the strategy of Oskar Pastior's 2002 'translations' of Baudelaire. It is a piece of applied translational research, an experimental translation laboratory, in which the process of translating is segmented and explored in terms of its latitude.

Oulipotic Concept of Translation

To understand this technique, one must understand the literary-historical context of Pastior's interaction with Baudelaire's work. Oskar Pastior belonged to Oulipo, a circle of authors that was founded in 1960 and still exists today (Oulipo is an acronym of *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, i.e. *Workshop for Potential Literature*). The association transgressed the boundaries of the so-called 'national literatures,' and it not only consisted of writers but also of writing mathematicians, linguists, chess theorists, and architects. Amongst its members were personalities like François Le Lionnais, Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, and Harry Mathews.³

The goal of this group is to replace the mystifying concept of 'inspiration' with the term 'organisation' in the sense "that a particular information entered is treated in such a way that all possibilities of this information are being systematically looked at in the light of a model," as Queneau stated.⁴ This also explains the concept of 'potentiality,' which the group bears in its name; it is about the greatest possible emancipation of the text from the subject or the subjectivity of the author in favour of a mathematical autonomy or momentum

3 For an overview about the history and aesthetics of the group Oulipo, see Jacques Bens, *Génèse de l'Oulipo 1960–1963*. Bordeaux Cedex: Castor Astral, 2005, as well as Hervé Le Tellier, *Esthétique de l'Oulipo*. Bordeaux Cedex: Castor Astral, 2006.

4 Cited in Klaus Ferentschik, *'Pataphysik – Versuchung des Geistes. Die 'Pataphysik & das Collège de 'Pataphysique: Definitionen, Dokumente, Illustrationen*. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2006, p. 210.

corresponding to the linguistic material. The aim is to systematically explore the features of a language within its range of possibilities, to run through the differences that produce meaning, to prioritise the open possibilities of language over factual linguistic practices.⁵

Such an elementary particle poetics sees itself as a radical amimetic work on the signifier: on the signifier in its phonetic and graphemic qualities and phenomenality, on textual molecules such as letters, syllables, and words, on structural elements such as combinatorics, syntax, and grammar—as work on the materiality of language. This ‘work’ (i.e. *ouvroir*, workshop) follows a method. Moreover, it has an oulipotic shibboleth called “contrainte,” that is, coercion, obligation, restriction.⁶ It represents the rules of the game, generative patterns that unleash potencies regarding its text genesis, and lead to an autopoiesis of textures, formal, and material *contraintes pour la composition des textes littéraires*.

Insofar as this *écriture sous contrainte* carries its principle in itself and generates texts from it, it leads to a *rencontre interne*, to an encounter of the language with itself. Because, in the end, an oulipotic text addresses only the entanglements of its limitations: “Un texte écrit suivant une contrainte parle de cette contrainte,” as Jacques Roubaud, another member of the group, stated.⁷ As these *contraintes* refer to language and are, in turn, linguistic, an oulipotic text can be read as one in which *the language reads itself*, as becomes clear, particularly but not only from some of the *contraintes préférées* of the Oulipotes. For example, from anagrams, which allow a language to be read through the materiality of its letters, or palindromes, in which it can be read in reverse. The procedure is the texture, the approach is the text.⁸ Oskar Pastior put it in the shortest possible form: “The ‘how’ of the procedure turns out to be the ontological ‘that’: that text be there. Conjunctive, virtual, potential. Oulipo sends its regards.”⁹

5 See also Uwe Schleppen, *Schreiben aus dem Nichts. Gegenwartsliteratur und Mathematik – das Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*. Munich: Meidenbauer, 2004, p. 406.

6 On the oulipotic self-declaration of the term *contrainte*, see also *Oulipo*, ed. by the ADPF (L’Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française). Paris: ADPF Publications, 2005, pp. 22–23. On the rhetoricity of the *contrainte*, see also Christelle Reggiani, *Rhétoriques de la contrainte. Georges Perec – l’Oulipo*. Saint-Pierre-du-Mont Cedex: Éditions InterUniversitaires, 1999.

7 Cited in Clemens Arts, *Oulipo et Tel Quel. Jeux formels et contraintes génératrices*. Ridderkerk: Offsetdrukkerij Ridderprint, 1999, p. 98.

8 See also Oskar Pastior, “Petarca, und andere Versuchsanordnungen,” in: Axel Gellhaus et al., eds., *Die Genese literarischer Texte. Modelle und Analysen*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994, pp. 257–286; here pp. 277–279.

9 Pastior (1994), Petarca, p. 286.

If in the oulipotic experimental procedure of an *écriture sous contrainte* language always *reads itself*, then this also means that it always *translates itself*. This applies not only within the respective language but also in the interaction with other languages.

However, the question is what this means for an “oulipotic concept of translation,” for a *traduction sous contrainte(s)* considered as an artistically researching, methodical technique of literary translation. An oulipotic translation concept had not been established in practice before 2000,¹⁰ and, in theory, not to this day. In his 1995 Vienna poetics lecture “On Dealing with Texts,” Pastior complained:

Let’s exaggerate (which we do anyway) by reducing our language (which we do anyway)—so let’s play dumb and say: Oulipo or not, text-generative methods and translating exclude each other. Just move in different dimensions . . . The process of ‘from one language to another’ is not yet a rule of the game . . . —but Oulipo, the potential workshop, could, of course, find, develop, and deduce further reduction mechanisms also in this direction.¹¹

At the same time, Pastior was fundamentally sceptical towards the concept of ‘translation.’ “Translating is the wrong word for a process that does not exist.”¹² He emphasised this in his Vienna poetics lecture several times and repeated it frequently in other places:

Because translation (and not only what the word ‘translation’ suggests) is, strictly speaking, not possible. But since the word exists, I, too, conventionally use it as a coin and again and again fall for the fallacy that there was something like a countervalue . . . Only texts that are not language, and are therefore no texts, can be translated.¹³

10 Graziella Predoiu tried to read Pastior’s 33 *Gedichte* on Petrarca from 1983 as an “oulipotic translation, as transplantations” and to examine them “in the context of oulipotic exercises in style,” yet the four “principles” she saw in the work are a) lack knowledge of the “original” language, b) dissolution of Petrarca’s metaphors into discursive syntax, c) total neglect of the sonnet scheme in favour of simple linearity with prosaic blocks as the characteristic style, and d) elimination of a historicising inhibition threshold. These, due to their diffused general nature, do not count as specifically oulipotic *contraintes* (see Graziella Predoiu, *Sinn-Freiheit und Sinn-Anarchie. Zum Werk Oskar Pastiors*. Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2004, p. 187 and pp. 191–192).

11 Oskar Pastior, “Vom Umgang in Texten,” in: *manuskripte* 35:128 (1995), pp. 20–47: here p. 45.

12 Pastior (1995), *Umgang*, p. 39 (again, see also p. 42).

13 Pastior (1995), *Umgang*, pp. 39–42.

The fact that a translation is “strictly speaking not possible”—which can only be meant in the conventional sense—applies only to an outdated concept of ‘translation’ in which a text transgresses a more or less explicitly drawn dividing line between two languages from one side to the other—with a lunge to the transcendental signified, which is necessarily a step into the void. Pastior immediately clarified: “If there is no translation, then every so-called translation is a special case of autonomous writing.”¹⁴

Translating as Intonation

His own “special cases of autonomous writing” of a Baudelaire poem, which were published seven years after the Vienna poetics lecture, Pastior consequently did not call ‘translations’ but ‘intonations’. Not intonations ‘of’ a or ‘on’ a Baudelaire poem, but intonations ‘to’: *43 intonations to ‘Harmony du soir’ by charles baudelaire*, as it says in the subtitle. Much more than an ‘of’ or an ‘on’ would be able to, the ‘to’ establishes a distance between the texts. At the same time, it brings them into a relationship of reciprocal reflection: the ‘to’ designates the white centre, towards which the texts move from both sides and where that “encounter with the boundaries”—which cannot be drawn—takes place as an “illusion of knowing and learning,” as Pastior described the act of translating in the early eighties.¹⁵

He understood his intonations as attempts “to aim for Baudelaire’s text—from a limited (and also limiting) angle of material strategies of arrangement and localisation respectively,” as “approaches, inevitably not on straight stretches,” as “gradually feeling one’s way to a yet non-existent figure whose details are perhaps already oddly outlined.”¹⁶ The term ‘intonation’ is, above all, of a phonetic and musical nature and means *striking up, making sound, or pitch movement*. In a wider sense, it stands for the (as ‘pure’ as possible) harmonisation of a variety of sounds, tones, voices, thus representing a state of mood and in any case refers to something that has not just been repealed within the medium of writing. Accordingly, the interferences between Baudelaire’s text and Pastior can be read phonetically, and, in particular, musically: as an intonation of a text’s tones, its voices, sounds *to* each other.

14 Pastior (1995), *Umgang*, p. 39.

15 Oskar Pastior, “Vom geknickten Umgang mit Texten wie Personen,” in: *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* 86 (1983), pp. 178–183; here p. 181.

16 Oskar Pastior, *o du roher iasmin. 43 intonationen zu ‘Harmonie du soir’ von charles baudelaire*. Weil am Rhein et al.: Engeler, 2002, p. 64.

Pastior's 'intonations' to Baudelaire, however, do not begin with the poem *Harmonie du soir*, which they incessantly 'aim at' in 43 attempts, and whose anagram gives the title *o du roher iasmin*, but with the name of the author himself: 'Baudelaire' or 'Charles Baudelaire.' Hence it is with precisely the linguistic special case of a proper name, which, as Derrida wrote, "remains forever untranslatable" and "does not strictly belong, for the same reason as the other words, to the language, to the system of the language, be it translated or translating."¹⁷ Pastior intoned the proper name by deconstructing it, which, in this case, means by anagrammatically liquefying it. The letter material of the name 'Baudelaire' is 'translated' into a cascade of anagrams, which, in German, partially bear a meaning. They are "findings, which obtain significance,"¹⁸ as Pastior himself would say. From 'Baudelaire', for example, he derived *adria-beule*, *idealbauer*, *aber du laie*, *debile aura*—which, in morphological, lexical, and grammatical terms, can be attributed to German but also to French and English. Or they may merely imitate these languages (such as *rabe die lau*, *barel adieu*, *dealer baiu*), or seem to elude any assignability (e.g. *leda eurabi*, *baude aleri*, etc.). A comparable process can be observed in the second poem, where 'Charles Baudelaire' serves as text material. Decisive in this overture is less the playful-linguistic decomposition and recomposition or the resulting forms, but rather what happens in them: the deconstruction of the author's authority in the context of a reorganisation or individual reading of the linguistic material according to the anagrammatic *contrainte*.

Being detached from its auctorial ascription in such a way, the language material of *Harmonie du soir* is processed in the oulipotic translation laboratory over and over again, and being intoned again and again. The anagrammatic method, which also captures the work title *Les fleurs du mal* and the section title *Spleen et idéal*, as well as the poem *Harmonie du soir* itself—anagrammated line by line—is only one method among many. Pastior brought up a whole arsenal of oulipotic *contraintes* to intonatingly explore Baudelaire's language material. I cannot deepen everything here, but I will select some examples to create a resonating body that will gradually build its sound from these textual interferences.

17 Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," translated by Joseph F. Graham, in: Joseph F. Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation*. Ithaca, NY, London: Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 165–205; here p. 171.

18 Pastior (1994), Petrarca, p. 280.

Segment as a Method

The first type of intonation does not, unlike the anagrams, refer to the *Letternleib*, the shape of the Baudelaire poem, but rather to its *Lautleib*, its sounds, involving a radical deletion of all semantics and only obliged to the material phonetics. For example, what Pastior described as “surface translation,” which is also a *contrainte*, represents the attempt to orient oneself solely on the individual sound, on the texture, and hence, in many respects, on the intonation of the French text as it is being intonated during the act of translating, and to ‘transfer’ these aspects to German, where they are re-morphologised and thus re-semanticised. This is demonstrated in the example of the first four verses of Baudelaire’s poem:

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir

becomes

wo saß sie wenn ihr [voici venir] gang & viehbrands ur attische [vibrant sur sa tige]
schlackenflöhe [chaque fleur] aus poren des einsickernden zensors [s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir].¹⁹

This ‘translation’ is blind insofar as the eye does not matter. The ear becomes the sole translation organ. However, by way of the pitch movement, the sound spectrum of the Baudelairean lines does not dissolve into an amorphous mass of language material. Instead it integrates with the linguistic pattern of the other grammar—in this case, German.

A similar and yet entirely different process can be observed in what can be referred to as *consonantising* or *vocalising*: the transmission of the source text’s consonant or vocal linearities into German. In *consonantising*, “*Harmonie du soir*” becomes—think of Baudelaire’s fragrant flowers—an “*aromen-dossier*”; the verse “*Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige*” becomes “*vesuv – nur alte mäuse wabern so rosa o tasche*,” etc. Whereby, here also, the ear is the sole translation organ insofar as it does not detect what the eye would see (in the not-yet-intonated text). A French ‘c’ sounds like a German ‘s,’ which allows “*voici venir*” to become “*vesuv – nur*.” The ‘p’ in the French “*temps*” is silent and

¹⁹ Pastior (2002), *roher iasmin*, p. 16 and p. 23.

therefore must not appear when transferred into German. And the ‘g’ in “*tige*” sounds like the German—however unvoiced—‘sch’ (“*tasche*”), etc.²⁰ The phonocentrism Pastior applied, which, as shown before, is by no means a general one, is most clearly manifested in the palindrome. For example, in yet another place, he reads the letter “z”—phonetically written as a ‘ts’—in the palindromic sense, like ‘st’ (as in, e.g., “*zaren*”/“*ne rast*”).²¹

The *vocalising* principles are comparable to those of the *consonantising*, yet Pastior varied this type of intonation to an incomparably more considerable extent. Not only as a “vocalising that reduces,” as is merely applicable to the three audible vowels a-o-i of the word *harmonie*—hence the harmonie/harmony vowels or vowel harmonies—nor as a “palindroming of vowels,” which brings these very vowels into an endless game of shifts that reflect themselves yet again. He also varied this type by *vocalising* the entire text of the poem, not merely by changing the consonants around the vowel-order in Baudelaire’s poem, but by changing the internal structure of the vowels in *Harmonie du soir* according to the alphabetically ordered basic schema ‘a-e-i-o-u,’ and moving it backwards four times by one position, respectively, in four runs per every single line of the poem. This can be demonstrated in the title line: The phonetic constellation of the vowels in *Harmonie du soir*—‘a-o-i-u-o-a’—shifts according to the basic alphabetic schema ‘a-e-i-o-u’ to the constellation ‘e-u-o²²-a-u-e’ (*deputat – statue*). After that it shifts to the vowel constellation ‘i-a-u-e-a-i’ (*insalubre magie*), which subsequently evolves into ‘o-e-a-i-e-o’ (*monegassipeon*) and eventually into ‘u-i-e-o-i-u’ (*mulinee dos piú*), after which, according to the basic schema, ‘a-o-i-u-o-a’ (*Harmonie du soir*) would have to follow again.²³

I am refraining from demonstrating the concept in all sixteen verses of the poem. But what needs to be pointed out is that in the game of endless vowel shift (because after it has been shifted five times including the source text, the game can start over), not merely the internal sounds of Baudelaire’s poem resonate. It is their *internal structure itself*, which gets abstracted by an infinite number of shifts. The only thing transported and transposed in these shifts is the constellation of vowels, which in turn are completely potentialised.

This is a form of the *traduction sous contrainte* that not only radically rejects all semantics but also causes a splitting of linguistic material.

20 Pastior (2002), *roher iasmin*, p. 32.

21 Oskar Pastior, *Kopfnuß/Januskopf. Gedichte in Palindromen*. Munich, Vienna: Hanser, 1990, p. 145.

22 In the first shift, a mistake slipped into the third vowel: The a-o-i-u-o-a of *Harmonie du soir* should actually turn into e-u-o-a-u-e—and not e-u-a-a-u-e as in *deputat – statue* (see Pastior [2002], *roher iasmin*, p. 33).

23 Pastior (2002), *roher iasmin*, pp. 33–36.

Pastior also made some semantic transmissions, altogether obeying the rules of an oulipotic *contrainte* as, e.g., “semantically ‘opposite,’” or “semantically ‘lean.’” Using the last ‘case’ as an example exposes a ‘lean’ version of Baudelaire’s *Abendharmonie*:

stengel vibrierend
diverse ausdünstungen
klangwolke duftwolke
schwindeltaumeldrängel

diverse ausdünstungen
es quengelt die geige
schwindeltaumeldrängel
firmament firmament

es quengelt die geige
man ist überfordert
firmament firmament
sonnenuntergangster

man ist überfordert
brunnenschwengel pumpt
sonnenuntergänge
tagebuchimplantat.²⁴

Reducing the semantics in this way is a process that can now be referred to as ‘classical’ oulipotics and was particularly mentioned in Raymond Queneau’s *Exercices de style*, though not for translation purposes.

The same applies to another type of translation, which focuses on a numerically and lexically controlled exchange mechanism. The respective *contrainte* is ‘NVA + 7’ and describes a substitution procedure according to which, in a given text, every noun, verb, and adjective (‘NVA’) is replaced by the seventh next noun, verb, or adjective in any dictionary (which is then usually specified). This *contrainte*, which was invented by Jean Lescure, and which Oskar Pastior made use of not only when translating into German but also when translating Baudelaire’s poems from French into French (*Harmonie du soir* becomes *Hasard du solde*),²⁵ moves along the axes of paradigm and syntagma, of

24 Pastior (2002), *roher iasmin*, p. 31.

25 Pastior (2002), *roher iasmin*, p. 18.

selection and combination; they were described by Roman Jakobson's formalistic text concept as being structural principles of both language in general and the language of poetry. The number '7' is arbitrary, as is the selection of the parts of speech. If, according to the rule 'x + n,' the number 'n' were identical to the number of entries of the part of speech 'x' in a particular dictionary, the source text would encounter itself as the 'nth' potentiality.²⁶

Finally, the question: How much weight does a poem have? In any case, according to its title, the weight of Baudelaire's poem is '169,' measured in terms of an oulipotic *contrainte*, which Michelle Grangaud invented, and whose outcome *gewichtete Gedichte* she referred to as *poèmes timbrés*, which can be read as "mad" (in the sense of *cinglés*) but also as (especially harmoniously) "timbric" and not least as "depreciated," "franked" poems. These poems are franked with the arbitrary numeric of the alphabet itself: 'A = 1,' 'B = 2,' 'C = 3' until 'Z = 26.' Having first learnt of this *contrainte* in January 1998, Pastior was "electrified" "from the very beginning,"²⁷ as he confessed to Michelle Grangaud by post. He sent "franked poems" to all kinds of friends and acquaintances by post—therefore with stamps, with *timbres* on them, and always in German—, outlining the respective weight of the poem's title on it. In the Baudelaire 'intonations,' he used the *contrainte* as a means of translation and calculated that *Harmonie du soir* has the number '169,' and, in turn, he generated German words and word sequences from this number. For instance, *meine mikadozikaden* or *orangenbuchstaben* or *charles baudelaire du*. One can hardly speak of a 'translation' in the traditional sense, and yet this *traduction sous contrainte* is, in some respect, the most stringent that can be thought of. For, in the act of franking, it leads to one (and perhaps the only) evident similarity between the French and the German language. Of course, both share this with many other languages: the arbitrary, yet multi- and interlingual regulatory scheme of the alphabet itself, which, in French as well as in German, ranges from A to Z and contains 26 letters arranged in identical linearity. The franking of poems—which, due to the postal context, not least contains a dialogical impulse that, in the first instance, addresses Baudelaire's poem—is measured by a code defined by an alphabetic order, and that does not change in the act of translation from, for example, French to German. The fact that *Harmonie du*

26 On this *contrainte*, see also Jürgen Ritte, *Das Sprachspiel der Moderne. Eine Studie zur Literaturästhetik Georges Perecs*. Cologne: Janus, 1992, pp. 95–96.

27 Oskar Pastior, *Gewichtete Gedichte. Chronologie der Materialien*, with contributions by Ralph Kaufmann and Oswald Egger. Vienna-Hombroich: Das böhmische Dorf, 2006, p. 19 (letter from 1 Mar. 2000).

soir—‘169’—can be transferred to the word *Letternge wicht*,²⁸ the “weight of the letters,” is indeed the wittiest result of Pastior’s implementation of this *contrainte*.

One could continue here even longer and speak of *akronymakronymen*, *akronymakrosticha* with counter-direction at the end of a line and various *zopfmodulen*. In the end, however, the focus should be on conclusions from Pastior’s Baudelaire project from a methodological point of view.

Applied Translation Research

Any form of translation, especially of literary texts, inevitably and incessantly faces the decision as to what exactly should be translated. This problem is examined in an artistic way in Pastior’s Baudelaire project. It is based on an experimental procedure that is organised in an almost mathematical-scientific manner; it defines a method, namely the segmentation by means of (the) *contrainte(s)*, to examine the language material under changing yet deliberately chosen perspectives. It also uses a serial circuit that inscribes an argumentative structure on the literary text. As virtuoso and reflective as it may be, the ultimate refinement of the project is that it not only performs a practice of aesthetic thinking but also convinces as a literary work of art.

Translation from German by Margret Smith.

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Phantasmagorical Research: How Theory Becomes Art in the Work of Roland Barthes

Kathrin Busch

Abstract:

In his latest statements, Roland Barthes imagines a becoming-art of his thinking. But rather than switching from a theoretical to a literary form he reflects his desire of a new writing as the beginning of a new thinking, which leads him to another knowledge. His intended new form is ambivalent. It results from indecision between essay and novel, critique and narration and thereby detects a hidden dynamic of thinking: Its phantasmatic sources and emotional conditions reveal an affective knowledge, in which the *pathos* leads to the truth and gains the significance of a *philosophem*.

I consider Roland Barthes an author who does artistic research. He occupies a threshold between art and science, which he opens up in his last lectures at the Collège de France with astonishing precision and honesty and—in the very last lecture—turns it into the object of his research.¹ Unreservedly he offers his listeners insight into what one can call the process of theory becoming art. He explains how he does his research—in the knowledge that this ethnology of his own process of writing and thinking brings something to light that obviously deviates from the image that is usually created of the way that a scientist works. His descriptions are valuable because they portray how thought unfolds in the aesthetic and thus create access to the processes, issues, and fundamentals of artistic research.

Crucially, the process of theory becoming art delineated in the late texts does not mean that Barthes becomes a *littérateur*. His process of ‘becoming’ remains unfinished, not only because his death abruptly put an end to his enterprise. He thought it was important to linger in this interim space. He sets up a

¹ Besides his “Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology” (1977), mention must be made of his three lecture courses at the Collège de France, which were published posthumously in 2002 and 2003: *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces* (1976–1977), *The Neutral* (1977–1978), and *The Preparation of the Novel* (1978–1979 and 1979–1980).

state of uncertainty between art and research, writing ‘as if’ he were trying to produce literature. This ‘as if’ represents a space where a phantasm—or, more precisely, the fantasy of being a writer—exists. In the imagination his writing gains space but proceeds conceptually in this fictional space. Out of this arises a conceptual fantasy or a phantasmagorical way of thinking that engages in theory-fiction.

According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, this process of theory becoming art can be understood as an unfinished transition, in which one sort of identification does not turn into another, but identification and its ascriptions are held at arm’s length and neutralised in favour of an as-yet-undetermined process of ‘becoming other.’ What arises out of this indecision? For Barthes: a third form. The invention of a new way of writing, in which theory is given an artistic quality.² Instead of switching from science to literature, and writing stories instead of theoretical texts, Barthes’s writing springs from the indecision over treatise and novel, interpretation and story, critique and narrative. As he says, one can react in writing to any event in two ways: first, by interpreting or commenting on it, or, second, by retelling it and spinning a thread. Barthes blends the registers: he creates linguistic figures that function analytically and develops fictions about abstract ideas.³ Barthes combines the “writer’s perspective” with an “interest in research, by telling about what has been researched, by spreading it, making it seem ambiguous, fragmented,” and figured.⁴ In this way, he suspends the binary opposites and formulates an attack on a way of thinking that functions with dualisms. Barthes cuts across other Western oppositions: like no other author he presents thought as affective and,

2 While the signature of this new kind of writing marks all of Barthes’s later works, he presented his ideas about it mostly in two texts: in his very last lecture course, Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the College de France (1978–1979 and 1979–1980)* (2003), translated by Kate Briggs. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, and in a short essay going back to a lecture held in 1978 titled “*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure . . .*” (cf. Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (1984), translated by Richard Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 277–290). The “literary” Barthes is an object of interest also in literary theory, where his late texts are considered “Romanesque experiments” (Karin Peters, “Einleitung: *Pourquoi j’aime Barthes*, oder: Philologie als Liebe,” in: Angela Oster/Karin Peters, eds., *Jenseits der Zeichen: Roland Barthes und die Widerspenstigkeit des Realen*, Munich: Fink 2012, pp. 11–31: here p. 12).

3 His theory is already fiction, of the kind that does not affect the substance, which remains committed to the truth, but the kind of expression, the practice of articulation. (See Tzvetan Todorov, “Der letzte Barthes” (1981), translated by Joseph Vogl, in: Hans-Horst Henschen, ed., *Roland Barthes*. Munich: Boer, 1988, pp. 129–137: here pp. 130–131).

4 Hans-Josef Ortheil, “Nachwort,” in: Roland Barthes, *Variations sur l’écriture. Variationen über die Schrift* (2002), translated by Hans-Horst Henschen. Mainz: DVB, 2006, pp. 195–217: here p. 206.

even more, he envisions reason sublimated by the erotic. This idea is strong: reason itself must be sublimated.⁵ When Barthes reverses all the usual notions about the cultivation of instinctual drives, affect becomes a means to increase the profundity of thought and carefully refine it.⁶ In categorising concepts, which always goes hand in hand with hierarchisation, dominance is exercised. Barthes's criticism of rationality, which is the foundation of his ideas, does not drive him away from knowledge into a world of pure, immediate sensation, but towards a kind of thought touched upon by affect, towards theory permeated by sensibility.

The Affectivity of Thought

Everything begins with *pathos*, or affect—with something that forces one to think. Thinking is not an activity, not a voluntary act, but something suffered, a passion. It is triggered by what has been experienced. It begins involuntarily. “Thought is nothing without something that forces and does violence to it.”⁷ Not: I research, but: I am seized by something that drives me towards knowledge. This process resists a methodic plan. Barthes follows Nietzsche's distinction between method and culture, which Deleuze has already addressed.⁸ The conventional scientific method assumes deliberate decisions; it is a purposeful activity.⁹ In contrast, the culture or cultivation of ideas presents “a violence undergone by thought,”¹⁰ a formation of thought by forces and violence that one either suffers or succumbs to. These forces determine the sensitive, embodied, or ingrained formations of thought. They leave behind traces and inscriptions in the thinker. Their yields are inseparable from the textures of the self. This affects the researching subject, which becomes different during the

5 See Roland Barthes, “F.B.,” in: *The Rustle of Language* (1984), translated by Richard Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 223–232: here p. 227.

6 The process of refining and nuancing is the theme of second lecture course at the Collège de France, Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977–1978)* (2002), translated by Rosalind Kraus and Denis Hollier. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005.

7 This is how Deleuze describes it in: Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and the Signs* (1964), translated by Richard Howard. London: The Athlone Press, 2000, p. 96.

8 See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), translated by Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 103.

9 See Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces. Notes for a Lecture Course and Seminar (1976–1977)* (2002), translated by Kate Briggs, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 3.

10 Deleuze (1983), *Nietzsche*, p. 108.

process of research. This non-methodical, yet self-cultivating form of research includes the subconscious. It can be guided by what the subject does not know about himself, and by what is solely effective as a force or counter-force in the research.

According to Barthes, then, research raises a kind of knowledge whose unconscious origins and affective conditions are not denied but utilised. It follows an affective form of cognition, in which desire opens up a path to a truth that is as singular as experience shapes it. Supported by the capacity to be affected by means of “sensitivity . . . affectivity, sentiment,”¹¹ thought occurs within a heightened sense of differentiation and an extraordinary lucidity. Affects, not concepts, comprise the guideline for thought. Barthes’s unusual idea is that consciousness functions as a drug in this emotive research. Like the notion of sublimating reason through affect, this idea also runs counter to the common understanding. This is not about drugs manipulating consciousness. Barthes considers the hypersensitive consciousness that is devoted to aesthetic thought as a drug itself, to the extent that it intensifies affect and presents “the vivid ‘sensibility.’”¹² Excessive awareness develops a total receptivity to sensory stimuli through which one ultimately becomes what one feels.¹³ In this state of hyperesthesia, affect and consciousness become one. Barthes calls this seemingly paradoxical liaison “affective clarity”—instead of attesting a dark or nebulous force feelings, they are permeated by presence of mind.

Phantasmagorical Research

Barthes demonstrates this affective thought in his lectures and seminars at the Collège de France. In conceiving each one, he begins with a fantasy that haunts him, and he uses it as a guideline for his research, first, by attempting to find a word for it.¹⁴ There is a need, therefore, for a connecting factor. Barthes calls it a magic “word that transmuted the fantasy into a field of knowledge”¹⁵ and is opened up to research. He then takes the word, which corresponds to a “stub-born affect,”¹⁶ and promenades it through a number of readings. This word

11 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 77.

12 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 96.

13 See Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 99.

14 Barthes spelled out three phantasms: the idiorrhymic (in *How to Live Together*), neutralisation (in *The Neutral*), and finally, the idea of the novel (in *The Preparation of the Novel*).

15 Barthes (2013), *How to Live Together*, p. 7.

16 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 8.

unlocks a wide range of source materials and theories related to his desire. It is as if the concept is carried out along “a ‘network of readings.’”¹⁷ The “forces by which the fantasy attains to or opens out onto culture: don’t act in a straightforward manner, are subject to unforeseen tensions.”¹⁸ He explicitly speaks of “an aesthetic of work (a value ruled out by science)”¹⁹ insofar as he does not systematically work through the field of knowledge, but only recurs to books that reveal an allure for him. So he merely uses the kind of literature that “crystallizes” something in him, thanks to the affect, and in this way, he allows the texts he works with to “think in [him]self.”²⁰ Texts have an impact to which he makes himself receptive and sensitive, and which he allows to become virulent in his thoughts. He does not deal with, analyse, or evaluate them. Freeing himself “from all will-to-possess,”²¹ he allows the others’ thoughts to germinate inside himself. Out of this germination, he develops figures of thought in which ideas take on vivid form. They, too, have powers that cannot be methodologically appropriated by science.

Figures of Thought

In the process, the field of knowledge becomes fragmented and organised into aesthetic “figures.”²² Barthes varies each theme his imagination provides him with, “instead of articulating it with a view to find a final meaning.”²³ Recurring to serial music, he identifies figural thought as a way of thinking in variations, rather than arguing in logical terms. The theme threads like a motif through the contingent of serialised figures. Their figurativeness is understood to be literal. Barthes’s figures are fragments of thoughts that have a “face,” an “air,” an “expression.”²⁴ They are more than merely rhetorical tropes of figurative or imagistic speech in metaphors or metonymy. They are figural in the original sense of *figura*, which Erich Auerbach defines as *Gestalt*.²⁵ *Figura* originally

17 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 9.

18 Barthes (2013), *How to Live Together*, p. 9.

19 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 22.

20 Ibid.

21 Roland Barthes, “Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology. Collège de France, January 7, 1977,” translated by Richard Howard, in: *October* 8 (1979), pp. 3–16: here p. 4.

22 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, pp. 10–11.

23 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 10.

24 Ibid.

25 See Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” (1938), in: *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, translated by Ralph Manheim. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 11–76.

meant plastic form, not fixed or statue-like, but as “something living, dynamic, incomplete, and playful.”²⁶ In contrast to *forma*, *figura* accentuates the sensory manifestation or external form in its dynamic dimension. It is the moving, transforming form, which is why the word is also used to describe the unstable fantasy and dream figure.²⁷ Later, in early Christian literature, the term is employed to characterise “real prophecy.”²⁸ *Figura* is appropriate here precisely because it accentuates sensory, descriptive specifics. *Figura* means signs in the form of a real, physical embodiment, which predict something that will come.

Aesthetic thought, as Barthes conceived of it, is also figurative thought: it creates something that is embodied, and hence, figures that are endowed with life and expressivity. The figures presented are visual riddles, or, as he calls them, “rebus drawings.”²⁹ In them the figured thought becomes gradually apparent; it is formed in the developing figure. It determines the formation of thought and drives out the imaginary. It makes up the figures that lend life to a thought. They have their own dynamics, a historical signature; they are born and die, go astray or atrophy. As something figured, knowledge itself takes on sensitive qualities when figures attract other figures, awaken images, or reinforce feelings. Each figure begins to think for itself and becomes a quasi-creature, itself receptive to meaning.

Powerlessness

In emphasising the aesthetic, it remains important not to contrast it with the political. On the contrary, literary texts are eminently political insofar as they cause a shift within the language, which is permeated by the compulsions of typecasting and ideologies. Here, Barthes follows Michel Foucault’s discourse, his analytical position, which has shown—primarily in *The Order of the Discourse*³⁰—how power and knowledge intertwine. In artistic writings, in

26 Auerbach (1984), *Figura*, p. 12.

27 See Auerbach (1984), *Figura*, pp. 13–17.

28 Thus, Christian teachings mention events from the Old Testament that foreshadow future events from the New Testament. What is crucial here is the reality of the occurrences; the figures from the Old Testament are not considered allegories, despite their prophetic meaning. Rather, they are “concrete historical facts.” Auerbach (1984), *Figura*, p. 30.

29 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 10.

30 See Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse” (1971), translated by Ian McLeod, in: Robert Young, ed., *A Post-Structuralist Reader*. Boston et al.: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 51–78.

contrast, the “forces of freedom” are at work in the “labor of displacement,” which they “bring to bear upon the language.”³¹ The political lies in the “responsibility of form,”³² in the issue of speaking “not according to the law,”³³ and in resisting the standardising modes of speech that exercise domination.

In his inaugural lecture, Barthes reveals the processes that neutralise the power relations of language and are supposed to provide space for the indirectness and latency of a singular, affected thought. He counts “loosening”³⁴ [French: *dépris*] as one of his basic operations to combat the hardening, hegemonic discourse. In a later lecture, Barthes discusses the process that is connected to this initially abstract-seeming concept as a figure of thought: “to unthread” [*parfiler*] means picking something apart.³⁵ Traditionally, the French word *parfiler* describes a process of removing the gold threads woven into cloth by picking them out. Unthreading is a method of fraying: the fabric is dissolved, thread-by-thread, to separate out the valuable material. What has been separated out is the nuance, the non-indifferent, whatever is of concern. For Barthes, nuance is not only required for thinking but also an ethical agenda: life according to the nuance. Writing watches over it. As artistic research, literature is supposed to pluck out precious nuances.

So, instead of recording, understanding, or securing knowledge, the fundamental task of artistic research is to dissolve the discourse, to fray knowledge, subvert truths—meaning, to fragment (instead of systematising) in writing and to digress in one’s elucidation (instead of arguing in a straight line). Both procedures or forms—fragment and drift—are basic forms of essayistic writing. The essay is at odds with the orders of art or science. The boundaries are different, not at the level of the abilities—sensuality versus reason—but of the different forms of discourse. In science, knowledge is a statement; in writing essays or in doing artistic research, knowledge is formulated as an expressive event. In it, the situation of the utterance is articulated with an “immense halo of implications, of effects, of echoes, of turns, returns, and degrees.”³⁶ As an expressive event that has detaches itself from the constative power of language, it does not censor the researcher’s subjectivity. The expression of one’s own singularity and the nuanced treatment of affects and fantasies means nothing more than worrying about one’s imagination, “on which depends

31 Barthes (1979), Lecture, p. 6.

32 Ibid.

33 Barthes (1979), Lecture, p. 9.

34 Barthes (1979), Lecture, p. 15.

35 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, p. 11.

36 Barthes (1979), Lecture, p. 7.

the vital thing we are used to call ‘happiness.’”³⁷ Here, the term has an existential meaning. It produces singularity. The surgically extracted nuance is intensified in writing and becomes the point where an altered subjectivity crystallises.

Body Essay

If, today, the fear of the powers of language and of the violence of categorising description or generalising subsumption is perhaps less urgent—because the forms of power have shifted and moved into the field of affirmations, of bodies and their norms, which are less conceptual and standardising than they are revivifying and regulating—then writing and artistic forms must answer to theory with other procedures. The subjectifying process of writing established in the wake of French theory, mainly in women’s writing by such diverse authors as Hélène Cixous, Chris Kraus, or Avital Ronell, has been recently radicalised—most consequentially in Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*³⁸—by a way of writing that plays in two registers at the same time: the discursive, analytical, schooled-on-Foucault, genealogical reconstruction of a pharmacologically operating ‘bio-power’ and the excessively subjectifying writing of self-reporting, which borders on pornography. In a montage process which places theory, along with confessional literature and historical reconstruction, next to instructions for sexual practices, Preciado radicalises both erotic, sublimated reason and thought in figures. For Preciado, it takes the form of a theory tested on his own body and in published self-experiments. Here, the figures of thought literally become flesh, when hormones are taken and intervene in the physical form. ‘Essayism’ has also become more physically concrete in the self-experiment. Its open form becomes the uncertainty of an existence that subscribes to a way of “becoming” in which the categories ‘male’ and ‘female’ are no longer effective and in which the physical is realised as what Barthes may have phantasmagorically imagined to be neutralisation.

Translation from German by Allison Moseley.

37 Barthes (2005), *The Neutral*, pp. 105–106.

38 Paul Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie. Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, translated by Bruce Benderson. New York, NY: Feminist Press, 2013.

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The Vienna Group's 'Research for' the Language Arts: Konrad Bayer, "karl ein karl" (1962)

Tan Wälchli

Abstract:

In the 1960's, when the assumption that the artist could or should also be a researcher gained momentum in a variety of 'conceptual' artistic practices, the Vienna Group of young poets was concerned with similar explorations at the intersection of language arts, visual arts and performative arts. The main aim of their 'artistic research' *avant la lettre* was the development of innovative forms of literature. The article distinguishes a number of such new forms and analyses more closely a 1962 piece by Konrad Bayer, in which the striving for a 'research'-based renewal of the language arts turns out to be closely related to an eminently political task: exposing and overcoming the lasting imprint of National Socialism in language and culture.

The Vienna Neo-Avant-Garde and the Rise of Artistic Research Practices *avant la lettre*

In 1962, the 32-year-old Gerhard Rühm, one of the founding members of the Vienna Group of young poets,¹ published a short programmatic text about the "new theater" in an architectural journal. At the outset, he declares that the "new theater" has to be based on the most comprehensive "idea" of the "means and capabilities of theater," and that he will develop this idea "by reviewing the elements of the theater." He promises an "analysis and differentiation" of the different "areas of theater."²

The first of these areas is "language," and here Rühm distinguishes, among other facets, the "sounds" of language from its "scripts," according to the respective human faculties of "hearing" and "reading." He also distinguishes language

1 The first and by now canonical historiography of the group was presented by Rühm in 1967, together with a collection of texts by its five core members (Gerhard Rühm, "Vorwort," in: *Die Wiener Gruppe. Achleitner. Artmann. Bayer. Rühm. Wiener. Texte, Gemeinschaftsarbeiten, Aktionen*, ed. by Gerhard Rühm. Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1967, pp. 7–36).

2 Gerhard Rühm, "basics of the new theater" (1962), in: *die wiener gruppe / the vienna group*, ed. by Peter Weibel. Wien, New York, NY: Springer, 1997, pp. 620–624; here p. 620.

with a “communicative function” from language that is entirely “detach[ed]” from its “meaning.”³ Communication through language, according to Rühm, can be further enhanced by choice of “typefaces and sizes, arrangement on the sheet of paper, etc.,” or, if language is spoken, by “stress, tone color, direction of sound and the like.” If language has no communicative function, this may result in what Rühm calls, within quotation marks, “script pictures”—in German: “*Schriftbilder*”—or “sound poems,” i.e. “*Lautdichtungen*.”⁴

These deliberations about the role of language in theatre constitute only about a tenth of Rühm’s text. Similarly, he details various possible uses of the “voice,” the “stage,” and “light.”⁵ He also differentiates various appearances of “humans”—naked or dressed-up—and “puppets,”⁶ as well as “basic types” of “spatial conditions,” such as various sizes and functions of the theatre building.⁷ Last but not least Rühm discusses methodologies of “performance,” differentiating, for example, “fixed theater” from “spontaneous theater.” He also emphasises how the “size,” “social composition,” and “mood” of the audience can vary.⁸

All of this shows how comprehensive Rühm’s ‘idea’ of the ‘means and capabilities of theatre’ is. He presents an overview of various theatrical ‘elements’ and distinguishes between their possible uses: language can be charged with meaning or lack it, verging on sound or noise; the human body can be naked or dressed; the voice can be natural or artificial, loud or soft, etc. The awareness of this almost boundless potential then provides the ‘basic’ for what Rühm calls ‘the new theatre.’ It allows a vast range of practical experiments, bringing about an almost endless panoply of new theatrical forms. These might range from a naked person sitting on a dark giant stage in an opera house; to a person on a medium-sized stage—and let some lights go on—uttering meaningless sounds; or two people—dressed-up, why not?—singing or speaking a sentence on a small stage in a bar or cafe; to a group of actors making noise or chanting along. All of these forms and many more are conceivable even before stage design, interaction, or dialogue would come up, and, still less, action or a plot.

The historical records leave little doubt that Rühm’s programmatic text was largely in accordance with the theatrical activities of the Vienna Group. For some years—starting, in fact, before Rühm published his text—the Group

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Rühm (1997), *new theater*, p. 622.

7 Ibid.

8 Rühm (1997), *new theater*, p. 624.

staged a variety of experimental performative events such as readings (with or without music), happenings, music shows, and more complex theatre and opera productions. The changing locations encompassed bars, art clubs and galleries, as well as small theatres.⁹ The same experimental approach, of course, characterises many of the by now famous prose texts and poems that members of the Group produced. In accordance with Rühm's analysis of the 'elements' and 'capabilities' of language, the Vienna Group explored the boundaries between communicative and meaningless language. They let language turn into sound, noise, or 'script pictures' and experimented with typography and layout in order to enhance or manipulate the communicative function of language. As a consequence, their works sometimes expanded the traditional publication formats of literature, crossing into the field of visual arts. Some members produced something that could be called early artist's books, and some of Rühm's 'script pictures,' for example, were hung on the walls of galleries.

While these multifaceted new practices stirred considerable controversy in the cultural circles of the Vienna bourgeoisie, they were subsequently recognised and have since been given a canonical place in the history of Austrian literature and art.¹⁰ They are also considered as precursors for international artistic movements such as situationism, word-based art, and conceptual art.¹¹ As I will argue below, yet another art-historical lineage becomes discernible from today's vantage: some of the group's works might also be understood as precursors to what is now called 'artistic research.'

The quasi-scientific rigour in Rühm's systematic 'differentiation and analysis' of theatrical and language 'elements' is hard to overlook, and it appears fitting that over some years, the group found itself studying 'linguistic science' as well as Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.¹² Such inquiries into the 'means and possibilities' of language—and the language arts—could be said to constitute a first step of 'research,' and a second step is the experimental

9 For some of the various formats, locations, and conceptual approaches cf. Thomas Eder/Juliane Vogel, eds., *Verschiedene Sätze treten auf: Die Wiener Gruppe in Aktion*. Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 2008.

10 For a critical view on the canonisation of the Vienna Group see Sabine Müller, "Die Wiener Gruppe, wi(e)dererinnert. Zu einer historischen Gemengelage von kommunikativem Beschweigen, stilistischem Protest und Sprachskepsis," in: Roman Horak et al., eds., *Randzone. Zur Theorie und Archäologie von Massenkultur in Wien 1950–1970*. Vienna: Turia+Kant, 2004, pp. 219–240.

11 Cf. Peter Weibel, "the vienna group in the international context," in: *die wiener gruppe / the vienna group*, ed. by Peter Weibel. Wien, New York, NY: Springer, 1997, pp. 762–782: here pp. 777–781.

12 Rühm (1967), Vorwort, p. 27 assigns an important role to these scientific interests pursued by the group [he uses the German term *Sprachwissenschaft*].

development of new theatrical and literary forms.¹³ Similar kinds of two-step processes have recently been termed ‘research to’ or ‘research for art.’ These particular currents of artistic research conduct inquiries into the technical, media-specific and formal possibilities of the arts and, via innovations in these fields, enable manifold practical experiments that may result in the development of new artistic forms.¹⁴

Ever since artistic research gained international currency, in the 1990’s, ruminations about historical precursors, or even role models, were part of the discourse. The reason for this was that the rise of ‘artistic research’ had primarily been instigated by the political decision to turn art schools into universities so that the theoretical debate on possible approaches and outcomes often preceded the establishment of practices. In this situation, the search for historical models played a considerable role in the constitution and legitimisation of the field.¹⁵ Yet, tracing historical precursors cannot only provide legitimisation, but it can also contribute to a new genealogical understanding of how artistic research was conceived. Indeed, although the political decisions were key, certain artistic practices from the second half of the 20th century also contributed to that development. Some currents of neo-avant-garde and conceptual art, in particular, had already embraced elements of academic research culture such as programmatic writing, theoretical sketches, word-based art forms, conceptual works, etc. This made it relatively easy for artists with these backgrounds to fill the new teaching/research positions that were created when art schools were transformed into universities.¹⁶

13 This ‘research’ character of the Vienna Group’s work was first underlined by Dorothea Zeemann. In a newspaper review from June 1958 she spoke of “inquiries into language” [*Untersuchungen an der Sprache*] and “research of [word] constellations” [*Beziehungsforschung*]. Cf. Dorothea Zeemann, “Die neue Wiener Dichtergruppe” (1958), in: *die wiener gruppe / the vienna group*, ed. by Peter Weibel. Wien, New York, NY: Springer, 1997, p. 307.

14 As James Elkins points out, the formula „to the arts“ was coined by Herbert Read in the sense of developing artistic “techniques and materials” (“The PhD degree,” in: James Elkins, ed., *What Do Artists Know?*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, pp. 103–121: here p. 119). As Elkins observes further, when Christopher Frayling presented his influential terminological distinction between „research into,“ „through,“ and “for art,” in 1993, he relied on Read but did not quite pick up the vantage point of “to art.” However, Dieter Mersch, *Epistemologies of Aesthetics* (2015), translated by Laura Radosh. Zurich: diaphanes, 2015, p. 50, suggests to apply the term “research for art” to technical inquiries in fields such as material science, chromatics, acoustics, etc., which prepare a “background against which artistic results can arise from drafts.”

15 For various positions in this debate cf. the contributions by Nina Malterud, German Toro-Pérez, Johann Öberg, Marcel Cobussen, and Michael Schwab in the first part of Corina Caduff et al., eds., *Art and Artistic Research*. Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2010, pp. 24–65.

16 The contribution by Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes in this volume reconstructs and analyses this historical development.

This genealogical vantage point allows contextualising the Vienna Group's 'research' practices. The group obviously participated in the neo-avant-garde momentum,¹⁷ and some of their works came to resemble pieces of conceptual art. While Rühm's "basic for the new theater" bears similarities to certain programmatic writings by conceptual artists, his 'script pictures' employ language in similar mechanical and 'scientific' ways as conceptual works from around the same time.¹⁸ However, the roles assigned to the artist/researcher in the Vienna Group and conceptual art do not entirely overlap. For Rühm and his fellows, programmatic writing was not an artistic medium *per se*, but rather it provided the basics for the creation of new, experimental *texts*, and these included not just mechanical 'script pictures,' but any innovative work of poetry, prose, or drama—even when remaining within the more traditional publication formats of literary journals or textbooks.

Another particularity of the Vienna Group's 'conceptual' practices can be seen in the cultural and political situation in Austria. For some members of the Group, the striving for artistic innovation was not exclusively instigated by the neo-avant-garde momentum, but partly also by discontent with the *status quo* of German language and culture, which they perceived to be deeply corrupted by the legacy of National Socialism. Not unlike other Austrian writers of their generation such as Ingeborg Bachmann, for example, they considered the fundamental renewal of the German language and culture a foremost task of contemporary literature.¹⁹ Among others, this was one rationale for the practices of 'research for the arts' sketched out so far.

17 Rühm (1967), Vorwort, p. 7. emphasises the group's strong interest in artistic movements from the inter-war period such as Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, and Constructivism. Due to a belated reception and the National Socialist cultural policy, these artistic movements were hardly known in Austria even in the 1950's. For some aspects of the controversial debate about the achievements and failures of so called "neo-avant-garde" literature, cf. Hans-Christian Kosler, "Neo-Avantgarde?" Anmerkungen zur experimentellen Literatur," in: W. Martin Lüdke, ed., *Theorie der Avantgarde. Antworten auf Peter Bürgers Bestimmung von Kunst und bürgerlicher Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976, pp. 252–267.

18 Florian Neuner/Stefan Neuner, "Zwischen Selbstorganisation und Selbstbehauptung," in: Thomas Eder/Juliane Vogel, eds., *Verschiedene Sätze treten auf: Die Wiener Gruppe in Aktion*. Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 2008, pp. 133–159, explore paradigmatic "conceptual" approaches such as programmatic writing or scientific, "mechanical" employment of language. Although they point out that Rühm only rarely followed these approaches (p. 153), their systematic examination allows to identify the few instances where the Vienna Group's practices actually did overlap with conceptual art.

19 Some important observations on this political-aesthetic complex are provided by Kosler (1976), 'Neo-Avantgarde?', pp. 257–258. The classical study of National Socialism's impact on German language remains Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich. LTI: Lingua tertii imperii. A Philologist's Notebook* (1947), translated by Martin Brady. London, New York, NY: Continuum, 2006. Although Klemperer's book was published little more than

But how exactly was the perceived legacy of National Socialism addressed in ‘conceptual’ practices? How should such practices ‘denazify’ the German language? As an example, I will now examine a short prose piece by Konrad Bayer (1931–1964), called “karl ein karl,” which was first published in a literary magazine in 1962. While generally in line with the ‘research’ objectives presented by Rühm in the “theater” essay of the same year, Bayer’s short text will turn out to be a particularly illuminating case. It allows, on the one hand, to discern a number of rather different conceptual approaches to the development of innovative literary forms. On the other hand, “karl ein karl” allows observing more closely how one such approach aimed at exposing and overcoming remains of National Socialist language pertinent in Austrian everyday culture of the time.

“karl ein karl”: Konrad Bayer and the Research for a New German Literature after the Second World War

Refraining from any typographic or layout experiments, “karl ein karl” is rather conventionally parted into some longer and shorter paragraphs, containing slightly less than 1,000 words in total. Very unconventionally, however, every third (or so) word is the word “karl.” In fact, “karl” is the only noun ever used in the text. As a consequence, the main agent of each sentence appears to be a person named “karl.” For example: “karl stösst auf.” [which can either mean “karl burps.” or “karl bumps into.”]; “aber karl gibt nicht auf.” [“but karl doesn’t give up.”]; or “und karl stirbt.” [“and karl dies.”].²⁰

In other sentences, however, two or more people called “karl” are involved. For example, the phrase “da stösst karl auf karl und karl verstösst karl” [“here” or “then” “karl” “meets karl” or “bumps into karl”; and “karl repudiates karl”] leaves open whether the two interactions refer to the same two persons or

two years after the collapse of the German Reich, he already provided some examples of where and how elements of National Socialism language survived in post-war Germany and he suspected that it might take a long time to abandon National Socialism entirely (cf. p. 2, p. 13, and p. 44). For an overview on the political and cultural development in Austria and the unease it created among (some) upcoming writers, cf. Katherine Arens, *Vienna's Dreams of Europe. Culture and Identity beyond the Nation-State*. New York, NY et al.: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2015, pp. 233–240.

²⁰ Konrad Bayer, „karl ein karl“ (1962), in: Bayer, *Sämtliche Werke. Vol. II: Prosa, Konkrete Texte*, ed. by Gerhard Rühm. Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1985, pp. 86–88. Given the shortness of the text, I will not reference any individual quotes.

whether three or four “karls” participate. In yet other, quite numerous cases, “karl” also takes the position of an object that a person named “karl” is handling. This is the case, for example, in the very first sentence of the text, “der verzweifelte karl greift zum karl,” where the “zum” indicates that the second “karl”—grabbed by the first one—is rather an object than a person. In another phrase, “karl und karl befällt ein karl,” the third occurrence of the word seems to denote a mood or sickness that overcomes two “karls”. Quite a few sentences, finally, contain so many instances of “karl” that it becomes impossible to judge which objects are denoted, or how many persons and objects are involved: “karl und karl karl mit seinem karl von karl auf karls karl in den karl geführt und durch karls karl nicht weit von karl entfernt blicken fragend auf karl.”

While Bayer’s technique is rather simple, he follows Rühm’s objectives of ‘research for literature’ quite closely. He explores the ‘means and possibilities’ of an ‘element’ of language—namely the word “karl”—and, applying these newly understood means, he develops an innovative piece of literature. But which possibilities of the word are used and what are the particularities of the resulting literary form? Does Bayer vary and expand the meaning of “karl” to the point where the word runs the risk of being stripped of its “communicative function” and reduced to its materiality—like in a “sound poem,” or in a typical work of “concrete poetry”?²¹ Does he present a sceptical view according to which language fails to produce stable meanings, as one could argue in the sense of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, for example?²² Or does Bayer compose a “mechanical” or “automated” text—expanding on, for example, surrealist theories of *écriture automatique*—to highlight the changing roles of language in the age of information theory and computing?²³

21 The term ‘concrete poetry’ seems to have been coined, in the 1950’s, by Eugen Gomringer—an assistant to the founder of Concrete Art, Max Bill—and the movement had further roots in Brazil (cf. Jamie Hilder, *Designed Words for a Designed World. The International Concrete Poetry Movement. 1955–1971*. Montreal, London, Chicago, IL: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016, pp. 5–8). Rühm (1967), Vorwort, pp. 23–24, details how he and other members of the group met Gomringer in 1956 and, for some time, participated in the international movement of ‘concrete poetry.’ When Rühm later edited Bayer (1985), *Sämtliche Werke*, he labeled “karl ein karl”—along with almost twenty more pieces—“concrete texts” (cf. p. 384).

22 As observed by Janet Boatin, *Dichtungsmaschine aus Bestandteilen. Konrad Bayers Werk in einer Kulturgeschichte der frühen Informationsästhetik*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014, p. 25, this interpretative vantage point—which has come to dominate much of the secondary literature on the Vienna Group—can be traced back to Ernst Bloch’s comments on Bayer’s reading at the “Group 47” retreat in Salgau (in the Ulm area) in 1963.

23 From this interpretive angle the work of Bayer is explored in Boatin (2014), *Dichtungsmaschine*. For similar readings of texts by other members of the Vienna Group cf. Harro Segeberg, *Literatur im Medienzeitalter. Literatur, Technik und Medien seit 1914*. Darmstadt:

For sure, all these interpretive vantage points have their validity for certain works by the Vienna Group. “karl ein karl,” however, primarily seems to be representative for the group’s aforementioned interest in linguistic science. Provided that Bayer developed a *series of changing meanings* of the word “karl,” one could think, for example, of Roman Jakobson’s analysis of two fundamental principles of language. As Jakobson detailed in 1956, the meaning of a word depends both on the relations of contiguity with adjacent words (what Jakobson called the metonymic pole of language) as well as on relations of similarity with words that it can substitute (the metaphoric pole).²⁴ Along the same lines, Bayer seems, on the one hand, to have inquired how the meaning of “karl” can vary when used in ever-new connections with various verbs and prepositions (contiguity). On the other hand, he explored the extent to which “karl” can substitute other nouns while still producing some meaning (similarity).²⁵

The most striking feature of the resulting literary form is the modular composition out of individual sentences that appear unrelated to each other.²⁶ However, the selection and alignment of the sentences are by no means accidental (nor ‘mechanical’). In fact, Bayer is delineating the changing meaning of “karl” in very particular relations of contiguity and similarity. Consider the verbs appearing in the sentences mentioned above—such as “burping” (or “bumping into”), “grabbing,” “giving up,” “dying”—as well as the tools or sicknesses/moods that are substituted by “karl.” While some of the substitutions remain ambiguous or even obscure, they, together with the verbs, provide a sense of action that develops as the text progresses: it appears to be a series of rather violent interactions between the various “karls” that come about mostly

WBG, 2003, pp. 258–269. Again, a point of reference was provided by Rühm himself, who, in hindsight, emphasized that the group had been fascinated by Surrealist theories of “*écriture automatique*” (cf. Franz Schuh, “Das Material der Sprache,” [1997], in: *Dossier 15. Gerhard Rühm*, ed. by Kurt Bartsch/Stefan Schwar. Graz: Droschl, 1999, pp. 11–17; here p. 13.)

24 Cf. Roman Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” (1956), in: Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings. Vol. 2: Word and Language*. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1971, pp. 239–259.

25 Jakobson is occasionally invoked in commentaries on works by the Vienna Group. For example, Michael Backes, *Experimentelle Semiotik in Literaturavantgarden. Über die Wiener Gruppe mit Bezug auf die Konkrete Poesie*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001, pp. 212–253, observes how Achleitner’s ‘concrete poetry’ undermines what Jakobson, in his seminal 1960 paper on “Linguistics and Poetics,” called the “poetic function” of language. In deviation from this approach, my reading of “karl ein karl” emphasizes how Bayer seems to *make productive* certain aspects of Jakobson’s *general* theory of language.

26 Bayer sometimes employed a similar strategy when composing *dramatic* texts from seemingly unrelated sentences. Cf. Juliane Vogel, “Auftritte, Vortritte, Rücktritte – Konrad Bayer’s theatrale Anthropologie,” in: Thomas Eder/Juliane Vogel, eds., *Verschiedene Sätze treten auf. Die Wiener Gruppe in Aktion*. Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 2008, pp. 29–38; here p. 36.

uncontrolled or even involuntary, and which are fuelled by a certain desperation (“der verzweifelte karl”). One could tentatively speak of slapstick, a perception enhanced by Bayer’s technique of repetition and variation, as well as those moments when the word “karl” risks to lose all meaning, leaving the action in utter darkness. (This seems to be the case not only for the reader but also for most of the “karls” involved, who at the end of the long sentence quoted above “blicken fragend auf karl”—as if in the end at least one of them still knew what was going on.)

Due to the particular choice of words combined with “karl,” then, Bayer’s ‘research’ method not only produces an innovative modular form of prose but also a particular ‘slapstick’ narrative. But what is the significance of this narrative? This is where the political complex sketched out above comes into play, for the word “karl,” far from being chosen randomly or merely for its particular sound, evokes an eminently political subtext. Reminiscent of Charlemagne (768–814)—the founding father of the later Holy Roman Empire of the German Nations—as well as of Charles I. of Austria (1887–1922)—who was forced to resign as emperor after the First World War—the word encapsulates the founding of the ‘first’ empire and the demise of the ‘second’. That is, it encapsulates the historical conditions of possibility for the ‘third,’ National Socialist empire, which after the defeat of the ‘Second Reich’ attempted to re-establish the empire in a new form—greater and more glorious than ever before.



FIG. 17.1 Konrad Bayer reading his poem “franz war” during the Vienna Group’s first literary cabaret, Dec. 6, 1958. A monograph on the Habsburg monarchy lies on the table. Photo: Franz Hubmann. ©Imagno / picturedesk.com.

Against this background, the multi-layered political intervention of Bayer's new narrative becomes discernible. First, "karl ein karl" can be said to diagnose an enduring omnipresence of the word "karl" in the everyday language of the 1950's and thus an enduring omnipresence of the idea of the empire. Second, in his 'Jakobsonian' experiments, Bayer diagnoses the multiple ways in which the word actually fails to produce its centuries-old common meaning and is subject to the general linguistic functioning of language. Accordingly, the slapstick narrative details how the subject position of "karl," the emperor *per se*, appears to be desperately upheld although it is unable to produce coherent, reasonable acts that would constitute an organised group (and much less an entire state or society). Third, Bayer's text supplements political-cultural diagnosis with an attempt at performative intervention: *highlighting* the various changing meanings of the word "karl" as well as the uncontrolled slapstick acts originating from the emperor's subject position, Bayer tries to further undermine the afterlife which the idea of the empire enjoyed after 1945.

The experimental and innovative text, based on 'Jakobsonian' inquiries into the 'means and capabilities' of the word "karl," thus arises out of a fundamental political discontent.²⁷ In this regard, Bayer's approach significantly differs from some of the literary forms developed by his fellow Vienna Group members, such as 'sound poems,' 'concrete poetry,' Wittgensteinian language plays, or Surrealist *écriture automatique*. While such forms are primarily aimed at exposing the fundamental materiality, meaninglessness, or ambiguity of language in general, Bayer exposes how, at a certain moment in history, a political keyword loses its long valid, singular meaning. This indicates that the Vienna group's 'research for the literary arts' *avant la lettre* not only pursued various strategies but also arose from a variety of very different concerns and motivations.

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²⁷ My political reading of "karl ein karl" aligns with the observation by Müller (2004), Wiener Gruppe, p. 229, according to which a passage about "silence" [*Schweigen*] in Bayer's experimental novel *der kopf des vitus bering* (1958–60) is not so much addressing issues of epistemology or philosophy of language, but rather the "silence" about National Socialism that dominated political and cultural life in Austria at the time.

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