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What is critical reflection?
A question concerning artistic research, genre and *the exercise of making narratives about one's own work*

The research fellows in the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme have to submit a critical reflection as part of the material for their final assessment. In 2013, the Steering Committee hired Professor Eirik Vassenden to read through 14 critical reflections submitted during the period 2009–2012 and to say something about the formats, forms and reflection practices used, what the critical reflection is about, its target readership and situation, and how the reflections communicate insight based on artistic practice. This text is a response to this challenge. We hope that the text will serve as good academic input to discussions about critical reflection among those involved in the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme.

Bergen, 28 February 2014   On behalf of the Steering Committee
                                            Aslaug Nyrnes, Chair

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> I am operating in a field where embodied, intuitive knowledge has top priority, and where the word «intellectualization» is often used as a description for something that can be disturbing rather than fruitful for the artistic process. This situation […] has made me worried. (Tone Åse 2012: 15).
>
> Not even a narrow theory of knowledge reading of history would find that art has taught us less skills and knowledge than for example 'science'. Art certainly does not need to be propped up by supposedly scientific terminology in order to legitimise its knowledge value. Research? – All right, and what would that term add to art in terms of knowledge and inquisitiveness? (Magnus William-Olsson 2013: 9–10).

The questions of how to acquire knowledge about and insight into art, artistic experiences and artistic practice is as old as art itself. The concept of *artistic research* is more recent. The objective of the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme is 'to initiate and implement Norwegian artistic research projects of high international standard' (from the presentation of the programme). As part of the programme, the research fellows are required to produce a 'critical reflection' in connection with their artistic project. But what should this critical reflection look like? What form should it take, and what kind of knowledge about and insight into artistic work will it represent?

The point of departure for this article consists of a number of texts that all, in different ways, have been categorised as 'critical reflection'. The texts were written by research fellows affiliated to the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme in the period 2009–2012. Another point of departure is the commentator's own position. As a literature scholar, I have worked on different types of artistic and scientific texts, but I have limited knowledge of the different artistic disciplines. I am thereby both an expert and a layman in the field.

The main question that has arisen as a result of my encounter with the 14 texts I have read, is basically: *What is critical reflection?* This question is an either explicit or implicit underlying premise in all the texts – and, in a sense, it also constitutes an important, and often frustrated, subtext: *What – on earth – is critical reflection*? This main question has given rise to several underlying questions: What texts or text types has the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme produced? And how do these texts work – what do they *do*? Has the Research Fellowship Programme produced new forms of reflection and knowledge? What value do they have? Has the concept of 'critical reflection' been understood more or less uniformly across different artistic and academic disciplines?

These are the most important general elements I will touch on in the following. In varying degrees of detail, I will discuss the different works that form the textual basis. Before I get to that, I would like to first discuss two fundamental issues that I consider to be of crucial importance. Firstly, it matters that these texts would probably not have existed without external, institutional rules and frameworks. In order to clarify how I myself understand the issues surrounding the potential 'critical reflection' genre, I will then digress to what I see as a fundamental theoretical problem here, namely the question of how experience from artistic work is translated into language, concepts – and reflection. One preliminary observation is that a theoretical vocabulary seems to be missing that could help to clarify what 'critical reflection' could be and should be.

First premise: The rules

The two most important guidelines to work on the critical reflection are found in the Regulations for the Research Fellowship Programme and the Procedure for Final Assessment, respectively. They both formulate concrete goals for the work and the textual product, and the latter also contains instructions for the committee's assessment work. The description of the critical reflection is detailed, and can be

regarded as a kind of 'instructions' for the research fellows. Section 5.2 of the Regulations reads as follows:

> With regard to the artistic result of the work, the candidate must submit:
> - Personal artistic position/work in relation to chosen subject area nationally and internationally;
> - How the project contributes to professional development of the subject area;
> – Critical reflection on the process (artistic choices and turning points, theory applied, dialogue with various networks and the professional environment etc.);
> - Critical reflection on results (self-evaluation in perspective of the revised project description). (Regulations for the Research Fellowship Programme, 2009: 4)

All these sub-items underpin the overall objective, but what most closely resembles a description of the format for the critical reflection is the unfortunate choice of verb in the first line: Requesting that a statement be submitted on a number of aspects of the work on the artistic project gives the reflection a narrative slant in which *information* is the dominant mode. The section ends with a brief passage describing the concrete form the work should take: 'The results of the critical reflection shall be available to the public and of a permanent nature. The candidate shall choose the appropriate medium and form. One copy must be made available to the Steering Committee.' The most interesting aspect here is the freedom of choice the candidates are given and how they have used it. It is not unnatural to expect free choice of 'medium and form' to vouch for great variety, particularly since this generation of research fellows has not had any clear model texts for their work. However, as this review will show, this freedom of choice does not always seem to have resulted in *new* forms.

Another key premise is that the texts are intended for *assessment*. They are thus not free reflection texts that are intended for open debate, but a mandatory assignment in a course of studies, to which certain goals and expectations apply. However, these goals and expectations are not very explicitly formulated. The

Procedure for Final Assessment (under Section 4.4.2 'Critical reflection') reads as follows:

> The committee shall *refer to* chosen medium and form and evaluate whether the reflection has found its relevant application in relation to the artistic project.
>
> The committee shall evaluate how the candidate has addressed the demand for critical reflection according to Chapter 2.3, including how the candidate approaches relevant professional discourse and whether the candidate contributes to critical reflection in the subject area.
>
> If the Committee finds that the Critical Reflection does not sufficiently fulfil the requirements in accordance to Chapter 2.3, the Committee may request the Candidate to further develop those parts of the reflection that does not fulfil these requirements. Such a request should be made as an interim report and has to be submitted through the institution. (Procedure for final assessment 2010: 6).

There is thus a potential opening for dialogue-based assessment, which mitigates the impression that the texts are subject to stringent formulaic assessment. Nevertheless, the critical reflection is a *mandatory activity* and a precondition for passing the Research Fellowship Programme. This does not mean that the candidates are not free, but it does, at least hypothetically, impose certain limitations on the candidates in their choice of form, tone and strategy for problematisation: The critical reflection on their own artistic practice, process and results is subject to approval by an external body.

Second premise: Articulation

Even though the candidates are given free choice of 'medium and form', most of the research fellows appear to have a shared understanding that the critical reflection should be a written product. The task is interpreted as producing a reasonably expository text that addresses and problematises selected aspects of the candidate's artistic practice.

The candidates thus face a fundamental problem of articulation, one which most of them also discuss either explicitly or implicitly: How to put into words – in

recognisable verbal language – the experience of developing an artistic project or doing artistic work? All such attempts at articulation involve the writer endeavouring to find a good and expedient language with which to describe his or her experience, a language that will also make it possible to process this experience theoretically and cognitively. A language that enables not only the sharing of experience, but also discussion and problematisation of the experience, so that the creative practice, filtered through a different medium, also becomes visible to the creative subject. In this perspective, the attempts at articulation are based on an underlying literal interpretation of 'reflection', which can function as a mirror, but also as a contrasting element, making the author aware of what is *not* visible, what is not held up to the mirror.

A good and expedient language for such articulation is created in several ways. It is created by the writer *inventing* it, in that the specific and unique artistic experience is given a precise, unique linguistic form. And it is created by the writer *finding* a suitable or almost suitable language for his or her experience by using various pre-existing language styles, i.e. by the writer entering into discourses that already circulate in the field. Although it has been common to see these discourses as guiding, influencing and, to a certain extent, *capturing* experience, I believe that it is important to envisage the interesting reflection work as taking place in the interaction between the specific experiences and the pre-existing language styles in the field. The existing patterns are numerous and exist at different levels: genre conventions, conventions within each art form, theoretical vocabulary, political and ideological positions, generation-specific ways of thinking, speaking and writing, etc.

Everyone who writes about one art form or another encounters these fundamental issues, but they are probably experienced most strongly in the non-verbal art forms, where the problem of describing and translating is greater than for example in fiction or poetry, where the art form and the comment share the same medium. It is self-evident that it is not always an easy task to put a non-verbal experience into words. And based on the candidates whose work I have read, it is

also clear that it is not at all easy to find a vocabulary with which to analyse their artistic work. Caroline Slotte, for example, wrote the following:

> When writing about my own art, I often get the sense that words and work don't quite match. Like equal magnet poles, they repel one another; as if moved by an invisible force they slide apart. Only by the utmost coercion, and only for short moments at a time, do I ever manage to bring text and work together, surface to surface. And yet, it is right here, in the quest for satisfactory verbal counterparts to the artistic process, that I want to linger. I have sought a voice that truly says what I mean, a voice whose inner timbre I can recognise, the voice of my unarticulated ideas. This has captivated me to the degree that it became one of my central areas of exploration during my time as a research fellow. (Slotte 2011: 11).

The search for a language and a voice that can transpose ideas, thoughts and impressions is not easy. It is nonetheless necessary, and it is one of the most important points in dealing with art and artistic experiences – if the knowledge embodied in art is to be more than just 'tacit' experience, it must also be put into words. This search for a good language for artistic experience and artistic work is not a new phenomenon – scholars have taken a theoretical approach to art and to the understanding of art ever since antiquity.

It has been claimed, controversially, that the art world seems to have developed its own jargon since the end of the 20th century. Alex Rule and David Levine (2012) characterised this internal jargon as 'International Art English': An English that has ceased to be English, but that over the past 25 years has absorbed the movements and articulation practices of the international contemporary art world, and that has thereby become a language style that dominates the work of creating, theorising about and, not least, *selling* art. Rule and Levine have produced several typologies – based, among other things, on extensive frequency analyses – that show how international art English differs from the ordinary written language in the public domain during the same period. That in itself is hardly surprising, since the art public and the general public have neither the same focus nor the same experience. Perhaps the whole idea of an *international art English* can be said to be, as

the two authors themselves point out, an elaborate joke? There is no doubt, however, that they are right in saying that different worlds of experience and language create their own linguistic spaces, and that they also, over time, stultify into jargon. What started out as linguistic experiments in articulation, become empty phrases and genre conventions. This is true of all specialised language universes: What we see around us today as often comically alienating administrative-instrumental *newspeak* also once began as an attempt to create more precise concepts and specialist language.

It is, in any case, possible to identify different types of dominant language and genre matrices in this material. Some are easily recognisable and resemble other types of texts with a similar institutional basis. Others are more difficult to place, and perhaps therefore also more interesting? We can make a list of what we are dealing with here. The material includes the following reflection texts:

Geir Davidsen: *Wikiphonium. Kritisk refleksjon* (UiT, 2009)
Trygve Allister Diesen: *On the Nature of Vision and My Personal Vision. A Critical Reflection* (The Norwegian Film School, 2010) + *Being the Director – Maintaining Your Vision while Swimming With Shark*, video essay (The Norwegian Film School, 2010).
Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk: *Critical reflections on Space for Interference.* (KHiO, 2012)
Pedro Gómez-Egaña: *15.05.2006 – 21.04.1976 – 19.01.2012* (KHiB, 2012)
Hans Christian Gilje: *Conversations with Spaces* (KHiB, 2009)
Jostein Gundersen: *Improvisation. Diminutions from 1350 ad. to 1700 ad* (The Grieg Academy, 2009)
Linda Lien*: Identitetsdesign for geografisk avgrensa område: Den kollektive stadsidentiteten i den personlege merkevarebygginga si tid.* (KHiB, 2011)
Kjell Rylander: *kontentum. återblick, omformulering, dokument.* (KHiB, 2012)
Siri Senje: *Imagining for the Screen – the original screenplay as poiesis* (The Norwegian Film School, 2012) + *Sculpting for the Screen – Digital Media Essay* (The Norwegian Film School, 2012)
Caroline Slotte: *Second Hand Stories. Reflections on the Project* (KHiB, 2011) + *Closer / Närmare* (exhibition catalogue, 2011)
Sigurd Slåttebrekk: *Chasing the butterfly. Recreating Grieg's 1903 recordings and beyond* (The Norwegian Academy of Music, 2010)
Håkon Thelin: 'The Story of ZAB….', 'New Techniques – New Works', 'Multiphonics on the double bass. An investigation on the development and use of

multiphonics on the double bass in contemporary music' (The Norwegian Academy of Music, 2011)

Andreas Aase: *Documentation and reflection, 'Improvisation in Scandinavian traditional guitar'* (NTNU, 2009).

Tone Åse: *The Voice in the Machine, and the Machine in the Voice – now you see me, now you don't. Artistic Research in Voice, live Electronics and improvised Interplay* (NTNU, 2012)

The material

The material consists of a heterogeneous set of texts that can be placed in one or more genres: dissertations (Åse, Lien, Eeg-Tverbakk), collections of philosophical / theoretical essays (Gómez-Egaña, Slotte, Rylander), short articles and collections of articles (Gundersen, Thelin), presentation texts, catalogues (Rylander), autobiographical / anecdotal presentations (Gómez-Egaña, Senje, Diesen), answer papers, conclusions / summaries, reports (especially Gundersen, Davidsen and Aase), but they all have elements of this), extended project descriptions and policy input (Senje). Both Senje and Diesen include a video essay as part of their critical reflections, in both cases a documentary, expository film. Senje appears herself as a staged subject, as a talking head and as a voice-over narrator,[1] while an important element in Diesen's video essay is an auto-interview in which research fellow Diesen talks to director Diesen about the artistic vision. One text (Slåttebrekk) is only available as a website, where it is not immediately apparent what is 'critical reflection' and what is a more general presentation of the project and record production (and where the last item in the table of contents in the left-hand column is a 'Buy album' link to the record company).[2]

The majority of the research fellows write in English – and in many cases it is relatively easy to see that it is not their first language. It is tempting to ask how much

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[1] In direct dialogue with (and in contrast to) a sequence from Jonze and Altman's *Adaptation*, which is edited in early in the essay: 'God help you if you use voice-over in your work, my friend, God help you! It's flaccid, sloppy writing!'

[2] Davidsen's project was also included or presented as a web post at one point (www.wikiphonium.no), but this part of the project seems to have concluded, and the URL takes the reader straight to the website of the Music Conservatory in Tromsø.

articulatory precision has been lost as a result. But this is a trivial and somewhat irrelevant question, particularly if it is a more or less explicit requirement that the programme is international and facilitates mobility etc., so I will not pursue this further, except to point out that one of Rule and Levine's best points is that writers in the international art field seem to tend towards a conceptually limited core vocabulary when ideas and experience are described in a written language that is a second language for most of those involved.

It is interesting to note how, without having to scratch beneath the surface, the different art forms can be said to be grouped in different genres: The musicians are perhaps closest to the traditional scientific genres, while everyone who trained at Bergen Academy of Art and Design has chosen a more open form, in which reflecting on the choice of format seems to be part of the assignment. Siri Senje's text addresses what appears to be an issue at her own institution (the Norwegian Film School), namely the question of whether work on screenplays can be regarded as artistic work. This text is thereby both a work of genre theory and a contribution to a debate on cultural policy. Diesen's written text, which belongs to the same field as Senje's, is a more personal and psychologising text that devotes little attention to institutional matters. His video essay is more detailed on this point, and introduces more voices to the debate about how the clash between the film artist's 'vision' and a commercial production apparatus should be understood. Eeg-Tverbakk's reflection text is definitely the most theoretical and institutionally-grounded text, and, as a reflection on the *place of the curator* in the administration of art projects, Eeg-Tverbakk also enters what we could call an extended field of practice, where the interaction or negotiation space between the involved parties is put into words in different ways.

This breakdown invites speculation. The fact that musicians in particular stick to conventional vocabularies *could* perhaps indicate that the articulation issue has traditionally been especially important in this field. The language used to communicate and manage the experience of music *is* conventionalised – both within and around the art form. Sigurd Slåttebrekk's project of recreating Edvard Grieg's

recordings largely deals with how *inadequate* the composer's notation language is, and how much is thereby left open to interpretation. Music criticism has thus always been formulaic, and it has always made use of supporting narratives that enable verbalisation by means of analogies or allegories: historical accounts, anecdotes etc. Håkon Thelin, for example, who has submitted three separate texts about related compositional issues and technical issues relating to playing the double bass, uses a music history and biographical presentation of the composer Philippe Boivin as both the introduction to and a substantial part of his presentation in the text about Boivin's composition 'ZAB'. Much of it appears to be based on conversations between Thelin and Boivin, and this also lends the critical reflection an interesting student-master quality, which is followed up in the rest of the text by Thelin attempting to *read and interpret* – sheet by sheet – Boivin's unorthodox notation.

Andreas Aase formulates musical practice in a manner that stands in clear contrast to both a more conventional academic way of thinking and to other more verbal art forms. This also influences the structure of the reflection text, and its function and significance in relation to the artistic and academic context to which his project belongs:

> Since I'm required to relate to the discursive sides of my field, I choose to discuss a select few academic texts, but without ambitions to create academic work myself. I don't think performing musicians practice *source critique* in the academic sense either, but gather influences instead, and establish new platforms of expression in a hunter-gatherer process. Consequently, I think I need to meet the demands for *contextualization* not through interdisciplinary theoretical art theory, but rather by naming my musical *influences*, showing what I have borrowed from whom. (Aase 2009: 5).

The opening sentence suggests that it is the *requirements* of the framework that are the occasion for the text (and the reflection work?). In his work on folk music, historical sources and types of performance, he defines reflection work as clearly non-academic, and points to how academic source criticism is replaced by a looser practice based on an idea of relevant 'influences'.

This may have to do, however, with the fact that different art forms require different types of work to a varying extent: a musician's primary articulation work takes place through performance and practice, and secondarily in reflection on these activities. Aase exemplifies this by referring to the often cited paradox that a musician's knowledge is *tacit:*

> Musicians represent *silent knowledge*. Despite the fact that I write and record these essays, the fact remains that music is something that needs to be *done* in order to be understood. Our way of understanding our field comes into being as what Svein Halvard Jørgensen calls an *action pattern*, and our knowledge is mainly stored in our bodies as intellectual memory, muscle memory and sensitivity based on *experience.* (Aase 2009: 23).

Although this insight in itself represents an important fact, Aase nonetheless goes a long way towards making it a programme – and perhaps thereby also undermining some of the relevance (or validity) of the very genre of 'critical reflection'? This dilemma is characteristic of many texts from the music sector, but we see that the candidates' willingness to address it varies greatly. As I see it, this is more or less the key issue for the vast majority of the research fellows.

Geir Davidsen's reflection text mainly consists of a short summary of 'activities during the period', as it is called in the language of project reporting, and contains little reflection on what lies *within* the artistic process. As he himself comments towards the end:

> The personal process of practising is the most difficult thing to document in an appropriate manner. Very many days have been devoted to working on elements at such a highly detailed level that it is impossible to see the work as a whole. This has been absolutely essential. As a performer, you simply cannot concern yourself with trivialities, and when you are in the moment, that is what it is about. That is why, if you were to calculate the number of hours spent on the project, the biggest category would be the hours spent practising at a detailed level. (Davidsen 2009: 28)

The *subject* of the project also involves certain constraints, but it is also inevitable that the willingness to engage in reflection, to embrace it, so to speak, is not evenly

distributed between disciplines and individuals. Most of the candidates recognise that the mandate for their critical reflection text requires them to study their own practice from the inside, in what Pedro Gómez-Egaña calls 'the exercise of making narratives about one's own work'. There nevertheless seems to be some disagreement about how thorough this investigation should be, and not least about what approach and form will be expedient. Interestingly, Caroline Slotte, who is one of the writers who goes furthest in testing the format, interprets the task as being about producing a text that is very closely linked to the artistic work, in a possible genre that she calls 'close writing':

> The project's development of knowledge is to be found primarily within, or in direct proximity with, the actual artistic work. This is something I aim to make visible through a close scrutiny of my own work process. I see great potential in this form of «close» writing. On the strength of the artist's position, he or she opens up an entirely new source of knowledge. He or she provides a voice from within – a peephole into the creative process. (Slotte 2011: 7).

While the allusion to the established method of 'close reading' in literary studies may or may not be intended, Slotte does appear to have attempted to build her own linguistic space for her critical reflection instead of sticking slavishly to the existing genres. In a similarly tentative tone, Kjell Rylander remains open to the possibility that critical reflection could, hypothetically, step outside of verbal language altogether (but goes no further than to ask):

> I have chosen to see the reflective part as a material that can be processed and shown in different channels. I have tried to find a form that is based on artistic terms, and I have therefore made it visual and three-dimensional. I have wanted to make it an integral part of the exhibition, made it a sculpture, but the question remains: Can artistic reflection be carried out and presented as art? This is an idea, and I content myself with posing the question. (Rylander 2012: 16).

The conflict between verbal and visual-plastic articulation described here is nevertheless an important theme for Rylander (as it is for Slotte). Another

characteristic these two ceramicists[3] share is an interest not just in materiality and the material's almost *archival* properties, but also a striking willingness to try out possibilities in their reflection language. When Rylander writes about 'deconstruction and reconstruction' in his work on different ceramic textures and readymades, this also applies to his own reflection text: 'It is necessary to both take apart and build up in order to grasp existence, they give different kinds of understanding of one and the same physical reality.' (24). His own writing can also be subjected to this form of fundamental constructive *analysis*. It is also interesting that Rylander's reflection text moves away from a conventional account, a traditional narrative, towards a more disconnected and anecdotal form – in line with the insight he achieves towards the end of the text, when he concludes by summing up the key developments in his own art:

> Less narrative
> Less holistic objects/more fragments
> More unifying
> More installation
> More mixing of materials
> More complex
> More methodical
> (Rylander 2012: 37).

If this exchange between artistic practice and reflection text were to be taken literally, we could perhaps envisage an even greater degree of consistency on this point. Would we then be faced with a *text* at all? What possibilities for critical reflection could we see being offered by more experimentation with the format?

Format and forms

I have already touched on how the texts fit in genre-wise. There is reason to investigate this in more depth, however, because superficial genre does not seems to be the only thing governing these reflection texts. Some underlying ways of

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[3] In the same project and project group, Creating Art Value.

structuring experience and knowledge also come into play. We could take Gómez-Egaña's example and call them *narratives*.

The narrative that governs most texts is undoubtedly *biographical* presentation. Several of the texts are structured as biographical presentations of either a) the author's whole career in the art field, or b) the project period viewed as a chapter in the story of a life. The artist's own experiences and history have a central place in this version, of which the texts by Åse, Senje, Diesen, Gómez-Egaña and Davidsen are good examples, but which is also present in all the other texts. Within this basic framework, the completed projects are situated in relation to an artistic practice and a lifeworld, but also in relation to a concrete, technical history: For example, most of the musicians include their *instrument history* in such a biographical context. Some of the texts also develop a constructive project narrative, in which the conclusion seems to mimic the (more or less formatted) narrative of the writer's own practice. Trygve Allister Diesen has given his written reflection text, and the discussion about the relationship between director and personal vision, a suitably happy ending:

> What I am saying is that the very fact that I asked the questions I did in my application, is telling of the fact why I felt the need to. In screenwriting we talk about needs and wants. I will argue that my want was to become «better, bolder», but that my need was to stop trying so hard, to relax that ambition, find a personal core, a personal footing, even a vision. I do believe that this research project has helped in that respect. I have gained a greater understanding of how I work, and why. And that will shape my future choices, and at least make them more informed. (Diesen 2010a: 28).

Here, however, the value of the critical reflection seems to be more the director's personal development than a specific professional insight. The video essay part of the critical reflection is far more thorough and nuanced, and it is not as strongly characterised by a linear narrative. We find a similar, but more developed variation of the same narrative in Senje's reflection. Her twofold reflection text tells the reader a personal biographical story about the project, where a central premise for film production, namely teamwork, is challenged. Is the creative work of developing a

screenplay not an individual, creative, artistic work? While the written reflection text is a matter-of-factly description of the search for a 'personal voice' in the work on the screenplay, the video essay is a *staged* version of the same story, but couched in a visual and editing language that takes us to a different place than the reasoned dissertation text, and where Senje is – or plays – both the main character and the critical documentary maker.

Another important narrative, which overlaps with the biographical form, is the *diary format*. This format is less rigidly structured than biographical presentation, and it consists to a certain extent of listing and registration, not unlike a collage at times. At the same time, however, this format provides a fairly direct insight into both the process and production, since a lot of material is presented with little organisation of the surrounding text.

A third narrative, which also intermingles with the two mentioned above, is the *report form*. It has a clearer structure than the diary format, but is also more *distanced* than the biographical narrative. Could it be that the framework for the course of studies[4] leads to reporting becoming part of the critical reflection, and thereby contributes to reducing freedom of choice and the possibility of choosing formats and forms that suit the specific artistic research that is carried out? *Evaluation* is a variation on the report form, and Linda Lien's text about visual identity and 'the role of the designer in local development processes' clearly has elements of this variant. Lien's critical reflection forms part of an ethnographic-anthropological exploration of the interaction between the arts and (local) democracy, and deals in part with whether the project implementation was a success.

The three basic narratives I have described above are all *linear* and proceed from one thing to another, thus unfolding along a single temporal axis. This could entail limitations. Although these different narratives are present to a greater or

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[4] I am thinking here about how the Research Fellowship Programme is organised as a project structure, where the overarching narrative is the same as for most types of projects: From an *application* with a *project description*, via the *implementation phase* with continuous *reporting* to the *result*, and, finally, an *evaluation*.

lesser extent in all the texts, there is nevertheless another – expected – characteristic that most of the texts share, namely an expository model in which the *presentation* of examples is followed by a *commentary* that interprets and explains them. This is also the basic model for most types of research in the humanities in general. The fundamental difference is probably that, in this context, the researcher is on both sides – researching himself and his own practice. This means that the researcher loses what a philologist specialising in antique languages get for nothing, for example when interpreting illegible Greek fragments, namely *distance*. Distance is an unconditional interpretative advantage, because distance makes it easier to categorise and to see what stands out. But a lack of distance also enables a form of insight into the artistic process and the nature of artistic production that traditional research cannot come close to through post-hoc analysis of the work. Therefore, the distance between the presentation of examples and the commentary cannot be too great – in my opinion, it is precisely this interaction, the movements within this field, that is the *locus* of critical reflection. How the different candidates have organised this locus and negotiated the distance between their own work and their perspective on their own work varies, although, superficially, the approach or model remains the same for all of them.

The candidates' understanding of the task obviously differs greatly in visual and typographical terms. Several candidates (particularly Slotte and Lien) have submitted complete 'book products', while the work of the candidates from NTNU (post-2010) has been published within the institution's conventional PhD format. Most of the texts, however, are simple text files and printouts. Slåttebrekk's text is an online presentation that is not at all easy to navigate, and where the dividing line between pure presentation and critical discussion of the artistic project is unclear.[5]

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[5] However, it must be added that the web design makes the presentation of the (very) many musical examples accessible, and it functions well compared to an alternative solution of printed text with attached sound files in various digital formats.

Science, research or something completely different?

The ambiguity regarding what the genre 'critical reflection' entails or requires seems to create both opportunities and problems. One fundamental question seems to be of a textual pedagogical nature related to instructing the reader: How to present a critical reflection on a project that the reader knows or does not know? How to present the artistic research *in* the critical reflection text? Most of the texts I have read solve this problem by *showing*, referring to, quoting or including various aspects of the artistic work in the critical reflection. This showing side of the critical reflection is set out as a principle of text composition in H. C. Gilje's description of this own text:

> A critical reflection can take many forms. For me it has been important to include different types of text material from work diaries, blog posts and catalogue texts. However, the main body of the text was written during the last months of the research fellowship. I have also decided to include extensive visual material, not only as illustrations to the text, but more as a complement to the written material. (Gilje 2009: 7).

Here, two types of premises for structuring the text are described: One is a compilatory, collecting impulse, the other a summarising, concluding and closing impulse.

In his case, they both bring the text closer to an open, unorganised report presenting the work of developing different types of tools, the technical aspect of artistic work. Several of the candidates have focused on this part of the project, and it could be interesting in this context to focus on the relationship between the craftsmanship (technical) aspect and the aesthetic and theoretical aspect of the critical reflection. What requirements should apply here? Are the development and description of technical tools, for example software, sufficiently profound in this context? Or we could put the question differently: Why not? Do we expect the critical reflection to probe the artistic practice and put its core experiences into words, and, so to speak, develop a special new language? The majority of the reflection texts that I have read 'borrow' their voice and language from different sources, and some of

these voices can be said to dominate the individual reflection texts.

The ==technical== vocabulary is one such voice. It is perceived as strong, and, within the aesthetic subjects, it is a hegemonic voice that perhaps also brings to mind the harassment we are often subjected to by our stronger and richer uncles in the hard science disciplines.

Other types of technical reflections are related to the ==practical and concrete work with a musical instrument==. Tone Åse discusses different ways of manipulating voices using data processing, while Geir Davidsen's critical reflection text is directly linked to trying out how the instrument is actually handled:

> The purpose of this document is to provide insight into my work on techniques for playing the euphonium. I will describe the different artistic projects that I have carried out and my experiences and results in that connection. I will also reflect on my documentation work, with particular emphasis on my work on documenting playing techniques. This is not intended to be read as a scientific document, but has been written to give insight into my personal experience. (Davidsen 2009: 3).

It is necessary for Davidsen to emphasise that it is *not* a scientific work, because, formally speaking, his reflection text (like most of the others) ==does not meet the criteria for an 'academic text'==. But, of course, Davidsen's point goes deeper than the formal textual level: This is not a scientific text, but a text with a ==different orientation and different ends – including to map and document a practice==. Here, he agrees with Aase, who also pursues what we could call an archival, anecdotal strategy, where his own experiences are discussed – on a continuous basis – as he encounters different styles of playing and examples, in dialogue with older and newer musical experiences as they are expressed in different written (and anecdotal) traditions. Thelin's reflection text is also very detailed and close to the 'everyday life' of practice – and for musicians, that means practising, using their hands, fingers and body, and, not least, it is about being able to *read* the notations of another creative artist. It is fascinating (at least for an outsider) to follow the meticulous work that Aase and Thelin (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Gundersen) do to translate bodily practice

into a precise notation system (and vice versa), even though the language they use is specialised. There is also a macro level in Thelin's text at which Boivin's compositions contain instructions for a *full-body* performance of the compositions. Both the composition and the performance thereby move outside a standardised register into a particularised register. In contrast, we could say that Slåttebrekk's work of recreating Grieg's 1903 recordings goes in exactly the opposite direction – here, it is about finding connections between recorded, performed material and a notation that by no means expresses the many variations that can be heard in the performances. In Slåttebrekk's (dramatic) presentation, the numerous attempts to solve these problems in practice resemble a series of scientific experiments that – just before patience runs out – culminates in a breakthrough.

Only a few of the texts comply with the generally accepted norms for references to and citing of sources. Tone Åse's text is the one that bears the strongest formal resemblance to a conventional dissertation. Among other things, this is evident in the way she not only uses, but also problematises the use of different theoretical perspectives. She explicitly states that the theoretical perspectives she draws on will not just serve an external, analytical function, but that they will also be incorporated in the work on reflection and understanding in a more fundamental way:

> The theories in use will not necessarily stand out as *theories* along the way: often they will intertwine naturally and rather be identified as theories when taking a step out of the artistic process – taking a comparative view.
> This intertwining of theories is therefore unavoidable when giving form to the critical reflection. (Åse 2012: 17).

The idea is that theory should not have a secondary function, but be part of the critical arsenal, and – more importantly – be taken from the artistic work itself. This is an important point that is not always made explicit in these texts: that practice also contains theory.

I also wonder whether it is a paradox that, while many of the artistic projects

focus on transcending the limits of their artistic medium (particularly Åse and Davidsen), the form chosen for their written presentation is rather run-of the-mill, and in a certain sense also not problematised. Davidsen challenges his own instrument, the concert as form and the concert venue, but not the critical text. Does this mean that text is not *his* form or medium? Should it be?

Caroline Slotte is a partial exception to the impression that the candidates have stuck to conventional forms of presentation. A 'scientific' expository form of presentation is also her chosen point of departure, one that she allows herself to deviate from at times, but also one that she constantly returns to and comments on.

In one case (Gómez-Egaña), the artist has introduced other voices in the problematisation of the project: Four *externally commissioned reflection texts* are included at the end, thereby creating a different type of situating and a different type of reflection that raises new perspectives. This can be seen as a very direct response to the instruction regarding *contextualisation* of the artistic project. The four commissioned texts form a series of contrasting comments on the main voice of the critical reflection, but, nevertheless, without *breaking* with it to any great extent – all the critics and commentators' positions are sympathetic to and *within* the artist's project. They add a few concepts, but nonetheless discuss the project using the artist's own vocabulary. Truth be told, these external commentaries serve more to push the overall critical reflection towards the exhibition catalogue genre than to give the impression of an open, polyphone and self-reflective text this was perhaps intended as.

Several of the critical reflection texts discuss the issue of scientific method. Some of the works go far in the direction of emulating scientific genres. Lien's exploration of the work on visual identity often resembles a scientific report, with clearly defined research questions and definitions of concepts. The text is structured like a dissertation, with the research question and *stand der Forschung* chapter first, followed by a methodological discussion and analysis of the 'data material' and research findings. Each chapter also follows the standard structure, with an

introduction, a discussion and finally a summary and conclusion. The first chapter ends as follows:

> In the following chapter, I will look at what it means to engage in design-based research and development, and at different methods for involving the inhabitants in the work of finding and communicating a visual place identity. I will also discuss the creative process and the potential conflict between externally oriented work with the emphasis on user involvement and at the same time facilitating a good creative process for the designer. (Lien 2011: 28).

This is followed by a clear theoretical discussion of the problems and expectations associated with *research through design*, in which Lien places her project, methodologically as well as theoretically, somewhere between *artistic research* and commercial contract research. At the same time, however, the text is also dominated by an anecdotal biographical form, which gradually endeavours to gain the upper hand in relation to the pseudo-scientific discussion. In the same way as there is a battle between reporting and biographical narrative in terms of form of presentation, this critical reflection text also seems to reflect an internal dynamic in the project between artistic research and a user-controlled (or user-oriented) development project. In any case, Lien's critical reflection is more conceptual and problem-oriented (and with less emphasis on the biographical narrative, although it is also present here, and eventually wins the battle for attention in the second part of the text). It is nevertheless an important question whether this work – one of the best thought-out texts in terms of theoretical scope and problematisation – can be characterised as scientific.

A reminder may be appropriate here of the important distinction between 'science' and 'research', a difference that we perhaps tend to forget in an increasingly technocratic and quantifying world (and that Magnus William-Olsson does not take into account in the quote cited at the beginning of this article). While 'science' deals with what can be measured in a more or less absolute sense, we could say that 'research' is about something quite different. Literary scholar Erling Aadland has

tried to point out the importance of this distinction in literary scholarship, but I believe that his endeavours to navigate this area can have wider relevance. In this perspective, research is a more comprehensive and more humane way of approaching the material; '[b]ecause research, unlike science, does not depend on an objectifying orientation' (Aadland 2006: 43). Research is nonetheless bound by requirements of accuracy and an objective approach: 'The methodological nature of research must also be deemed to include its reliability, its absolute zero tolerance of cheating, its open relationship with sources, data and previous research – in brief, research is a non-private, open activity of a methodical nature' (Aadland 2006: 43). The most important difference between science and research in this perspective, however, is that research is not about pure objectivity, but about what happens *in practice*, *in the research event* (regardless of whether the practice in question is interpretative or performative). Science registers, while research is productive and creative.

We could take this view further and try to develop a preliminary theory about what type of reflective work takes place in (artistic) practice. Swedish poet and critic Magnus William-Olsson has tried to establish the term *performative criticism* to say something about how the artistic event or practice always also encompasses its own evaluation and reflection:

> the relationship between doing and interpreting is essential to all artistic creation. You try something out and then try with all your mental faculties, ability and knowledge to decide whether it is worth keeping and building on or whether it must be discarded. You oscillate between reading and writing, between playing and listening, between intention, performance and evaluation in order to find an answer in the form of a *way*, a relevant perspective, an example. The ability to answer, to train your sensibility to what has been done is primarily the artist's art, an art that can be refined and changed, sometimes in completely different directions, but always and in all variations without end. (William-Olsson 2013: 13).

As William-Olsson sees it, artistic work is a continuous process of drafts and

answers, which, in its general description, intuitively seems to cover most forms of creative and interpretative work. It is a decisive question, however, how the knowledge acquired through this effort is to be understood and articulated. If it is right that 'the creation of art not only offers a particular way of understanding, but also unique knowledge that cannot be obtained from other sources or in other ways' (14), would that not suggest that this knowledge, this way of understanding, must also take (or take over) forms other than the conventional knowledge genres?

Reflection as – and in – practice

As discussed above, the basic model of presentation followed by comments is, logically enough, the form chosen by most of the research fellows. Usually, more of the text is devoted to presentation than to the commentary, and the presentation typically consists of a discussion about projects carried out and issues – often retelling and dramatising the story in the past tense: I did A, which led to B. The temporal situating of the reflection text can perhaps explain why such conventional narratives have become so dominant, and Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk's description of the reflection text as a post-hoc (and formally mandatory) part of the project is representative: 'I wrote these reflections a long time after the practical parts of the research fellowship were completed' (Eeg-Tverbakk 2012: 2). He believes that this distance in time had both positive and negative consequences for the reflection text: 'The temporal distance has relaxed the relationship to the different activities and made it possible to see new aspects of the work. At the same time, this distance allows for retrospective rationalisation and interpretations that may obscure the actual turn of events' (3). The distance has also made it more difficult to see the reflection as 'performative'; in such cases, we could describe the reflection as evaluating and contemplative rather than *practising*.

In many cases, discoveries and reflections are also presented as gradual 'drips' of understanding or reflection that arise during the course of the (chronological) presentation, for example in Andreas Aase's text: 'As my work has progressed, I

seem to notice that fiddle-like ornaments have crept into my improvisations without a conscious practice effort.' (Aase 2009: 93). Such diary-like registrations are widespread, and most frequent by far among the musicians. However, this type of practical self-reflection does not as a rule make the candidates – or the reflection text – stop and dig deeper.

A descriptive mode can be said to dominate, but one that occasionally opens itself to other experiences, as in the above example from Aase. We also see examples of the usual biographical project/career description dissolving into other narratives. Caroline Slotte approaches this way of thinking and writing when she plays different types of texts and voices off against each other – short biographical prose texts, descriptive reviews of technical execution, interpretative comments on the work of art etc. This crossing of boundaries is even clearer in the exhibition catalogue, which in itself serves as a type of critical reflection. In this way, she carries out a textual exploration of which voices can help to communicate what she describes as the 'core' of the project. The objective, reasoning voice also has its function. Among other things, it clarifies for the artist what the methodology actually looks like. Although Slotte ends her critical reflection by, in a somewhat resigned manner, concluding that, while she has not developed her artistic practice as much as she might have wished to, there is nevertheless a discernible movement between different sub-projects – and the way in which they relate to each other:

> I wrote above that sheer curiosity drove me to work serially. It is true that my method is built largely on an object-by-object progression: What happens if I subject this object to that treatment? Nevertheless, as a series evolves, I strive constantly to achieve sufficient variation from one object to the next, complementing the totality with objects that contribute new information and fill out the series. (Slotte 2011: 11).

Slotte's reflection text describes a number of sub-projects, constantly pursuing new elements from project to project, and the reflection text shows how insights develop that are then used in the next sub-project.

It is clear in the case of several of the research fellows, however, that the work on – and problems relating to – the articulation of experiences make it difficult to achieve specific insights. This is particularly clear in Diesen's work on the concept of 'vision', and the movement from a limited, project-specific definition of *vision* to an overarching, general (and personal) definition of vision as an 'outlook' or '(artistic) philosophy of life'. The interesting thing about this particular text is that the two-part critical reflection so clearly demonstrates the problem of articulation. The video essay elegantly highlights the issues through a multifaceted discussion in which a range of voices and perspectives make themselves heard in a language that Diesen masters (structure, editing, direction). The written part of the reflection, on the other hand, generalises much more. The written discussion develops into a general theory of art, thereby moving away from practice and into a field, namely aesthetic philosophy, where the requirements as regards formulation and precision are dramatically more stringent than in the more limited 'artistic self-assessment'. In a nutshell, we could say that Diesen here demonstrates a simple, but important point: Most specialists think best – and most precisely – in their own specialised language.

Critical reflection – on what and for whom?

It is an important question how the theoretical-philosophical reflection is rooted in the artistic practice. It is also crucial how it is situated in relation to other contexts. As instructed in the guidelines, all the reflection texts contextualise their artistic practice in relation to at least two backgrounds: one (international and/or national) artistic arena and one personal horizon of experience and interests. If I were to evaluate which reflection works are *good texts*, it is my clear impression that the more or less purely biographical (or summarising) form of presentation is the least interesting. Without a genuine grounding in the most artistic aspects of the project, the (auto)biographical form seems surprisingly uninteresting. I will give some examples of attempts to reconcile these two horizons.

In brief, Tone Åse's project deals with articulation in the concrete sense, and

with the possibility of expanding the human voice's register and forms of expression by means of electronic manipulation of song and other voice-created sounds. It is thereby also about the relationship between the intelligible and the non-intelligible, i.e. what results in different types of 'meaning' and what is not automatically perceived as meaningful. It is an explicit aim to problematise this distinction:

> Meaning can be experienced in several ways and as many nuances. It seems reasonable to think that the highest clarity of meaning comes with verbal/textual utterances, with intelligibly spoken words, presented in a clear, natural way, as with a good radio voice. Still, one could argue that non-verbal, but easy recognizable, sounds or expressions referring to concrete emotions (screaming) or phenomena (engines, dogs barking,) could provide the listener with equally meaningful information as words do. So *clarity in meaning* is not easy to define. (Åse 2012: 78).

This reflection could be read as a meta-comment on all the work on critical reflection. For all the artists involved, it is about navigating the space between meaning and what we might call not-yet-meaning, with a clear and explicit expectation of achieving – or communicating – a certain *clarity of meaning* through the critical reflection.

Pedro Gómez-Egaña's projects are all about the exploration of concepts, ideas and *impressions*. Many of his works are centred on the relationship between something ordinary, normalised, functional – and what transcends normality: disaster, destruction. For example, one of his video productions, a kind of commentary and information film, is about how the televised universe feeds on disaster and cultivates its absolute power as an exception and a unique, indescribable event, but has also developed a complex and effective battery of dramaturgy and dramatisation techniques – i.e. articulation – to control and exploit the disaster. In other works, he highlights and stages variations on the disaster motive, often with humour, but nearly always with a consistent focus on disaster and on our, the onlooker's, understanding of it. Thus we could say that a form of critical reflection is incorporated into the basic theme of the project: Disaster is a random event that

strikes suddenly, a state of emergency that we lack a vocabulary to describe, and that we can therefore only try to prepare for, without knowing what the preparations should be. And *once* it has struck, we can only try to understand what it is that has happened – and we must do so without a ready-made vocabulary.

The fact that the core of the project is formulated as a concept (disaster anxiety, nervousness etc.) means that the reflection text also has a greater responsibility to explain. Development work at the ideas level is being done here, and the reflection text builds up a dramaturgy that progresses from a description of a vague impression to a concrete concept. It may not be a dramatic 'discovery' or research 'breakthrough', but it is nevertheless an insight that the reader perceives as having been *developed through writing*. In the reflection text, this is described as follows:

> The notion of trauma appeared towards the end of a reflective and practical journey that, in three years, has moved between anxiety, alert, the catastrophic, and the ghostly. This journey has seen a shift in an iconographical material, from concrete imaginations of future disasters to suggestive scenarios of empty homes, empty warehouses, mysterious spectacles and lost, suspended characters. (Gómez-Egaña 2012: 26).

The submitted critical reflection shows that Gómez-Egaña has a strong personal investment in his approach to disaster: Already on page 5, he identifies the fear of accidents with his own diagnosed anxiety.

His reflection work is thus a text that links together works of art, themes, the work process, biography, pathology and sociology in an attempt to understand an artistic practice that is about trying to understand – and to expand the understanding of – work on ideas relating to different types of anxiety and fear. As a philosophical reflection on the permanent social 'anxiety' of our time, the reflection text often relies on assertions. It is only once it investigates its own basis, the artistic statements and the spaces between them and the (post-hoc?) reflection that it appears to 'work', both for the writer and the reader.

A fairly crucial question for every author of a text is the question of who one is writing for, and how one chooses to understand – or 'construct' – one's audience. How have the different candidates understood the target group and the situation? It is no exaggeration to say that the task has been fairly freely interpreted. Naturally, all these texts are part of a kind of *self-reflection* in which focus is on how the artist views and investigates his or her own practice, and on the artist's own understanding and insight in relation to it. This can largely be thought of as a form of essay writing in the old-fashioned sense: An I who speaks to itself, largely also about itself. To a certain extent also *for* itself, and this is something I see as problematic in several of the critical reflection texts I have examined, namely that they are to a certain extent hermetic or self-enclosed in that they do little to seek a larger arena for discussion. The critical reservoir and vocabulary thereby remains small.

The text that perhaps best expresses which framework it should be understood within, and also provides a user manual for the critical reflection text, is Caroline Slotte's. Like Eeg-Tverbakk, she also tries to make productive use of the retrospective perspective:

> This text was written towards the end of the research fellowship and can be seen as a form of travelogue. Its purpose is to visualize, discuss and give a background to my artistic research. The text should accompany us – you, me – through the most crucial stages and themes of the work, thereby enabling us to relate to, talk about and evaluate the development of the project and the end result. (Slotte 2011a: 6).

Here, the reflection text is seen as an *articulation tool* that can enable both the artist and the reader – 'us – you, me' – to relate to and evaluate the project. It is no coincidence that we find this very crucial point so clearly formulated. Her project is summarised in one sentence as just such an attempt to create meaning and to say something about why: *'I have tried to make meaningful objects, after which I have tried to say something true about why I made them.'* (6).

Some of the candidates have interpreted the situation as being a form of

justification of their project rather than merely a final report summarising the activity. As I see it, this is some way from the mandate given for the critical reflection. This may well be unavoidable, since 'critical reflection' *is* vaguely defined in the premises, and not all the individual projects have been decided and described with the same clarity. To some of the research fellows, this may only become clear in and through their work on the reflection text, that is, in hindsight. In several cases, the critical reflection text clearly states that something crucial is discovered during the reflection and writing process. The texts that most resemble reports and summaries stand out here as often being more structured and organised, but perhaps less insightful.

The reflection texts thus communicate insight into the authors' artistic practice in two distinct ways: by presenting it more or less in *report form*, and by showing practice and its place in a critical/expository discourse, and by opening up the process behind the work.

Several of the texts appear to be trapped in the logic of project description where the writing is done within a familiar framework: 'selling' a project, describing the parts of the project and its feasibility. Reporting during and after project implementation also has a central place. It is my impression that the reflection texts have, to a certain extent, acquired the status of final report in this framework. These report texts are also less interesting as *texts*, although they are capable of communicating relevant and interesting points and insights (the intended reader in the most report-like texts also appears to be a formal assessment body within the educational field).

Critical reflection as productive work?

As William-Olsson touches on, it is possible to consider every artistic practice as a critical, i.e. reflective and assessing, statement in itself. In that case, it may be as much a matter of *reading* one's own practice and process as of reporting on it. And as we know, reading means interpreting. What will artists find if they read their own artistic work in this manner? A pragmatic answer to this question can be found in

Tone Åse's text: 'During, and through my research, I have gradually become more aware of the *genre* and *field* I relate to, i.e. my *artistic landscape*' (Åse 2012: 21). She relates this to Aslaug Nyrnes' topological way of thinking in the essay *Lighting from the side*, but Åse makes the point that it is *her own* artistic topologies that are being negotiated. Interestingly, she primarily uses spatial metaphors when establishing the categories within which she discusses different types of voice and sound functions. She uses the main categories 'broadened' and 'narrowed' voice, and 'placed' and 'reconstructed' voice to describe what the different processing tools can do to the vocal material. These categories have a productive function. However, they also create some clear frameworks continuously referring back to a 'normal' or 'neutral' unprocessed natural voice.

But this discussion of the human voice as a malleable material, which fills a whole chapter, also raises another question, a question of principle: Is Åse endeavouring to find concepts and reflection tools that she can use in her own practice, or is she exploring this field in general and in principle? The difference may seem small or sophistical, but I believe that what we see here may be an interesting distinction between artistic research – the exploration of own practice – and conventional research. In any case, it is clear that the temperature in the text rises when it approaches the artist's own practical experience, and perhaps particularly in her meeting, or confrontation, with her audience. This is where Åse's critical reflection really comes alive. For her, and probably for most of the others as well, one of the main aims has been to succeed in getting to grips with such a central theme or issue in their own practice.

In several of the candidates' work, but most clearly in Caroline Slotte's, such an issue that appears to be important emerges in the reflection work: namely that the artist begins to see his or her material as a conversation partner, and the artistic work is understood within the framework of a sort of 'negotiation' where the artist and the material (in Slotte's case particularly old used porcelain objects) exchange experiences and, so to speak, share memories. Would this insight have emerged so

clearly without this articulation work and without the focus on articulation, verbalisation and (self-)reflection that the Research Fellowship Programme requires?

In the conclusion to Slotte's text, a new core place of this kind somewhat surprisingly emerges. Interestingly enough, this takes place together with a recognition that the artistic exploration of the serial and the material has come to an end, like a closed chapter. The new place is the place of writing:

> Concerning the written part of the project, it is *how*, rather than *what*, I have written that has perhaps contributed most to development in the field. I have looked for verbal alternatives to the detached, academic voice when writing about my work. In particular, I have explored subjective writing as a means of accessing the knowledge development that takes place in practice when a work of art is created. 'The artist as writer' is a theme that has fascinated me, and thus the discussion of the role of text in artistic research, and in artistic practices in general, has taken a prominent position in my project. (Slotte 2011: 80).

This important twist at the very end of the reflection text does not arise from theoretical input, but from Slotte's continuous conversation with herself and her material, and one might ask: Is it the critical reflection that has generated this new impulse? Has the critical reflection taken centre stage, or have two practices melted together?

What – *on earth* – is critical reflection? A possible conclusion

In my opinion, the reflection texts can be seen as practical answers to three central questions, which the candidates emphasise (sometimes very) differently: 1) the relationship between their own artistic practice and the surrounding field, 2) the relationship between their own artistic practice and the problem of articulation, and 3) the relationship between their own artistic practice and their personal experience of theoretical work and reflection work.

In conclusion, the critical reflection texts that I have read and commented on can be assessed in relation to the following: all the texts document artists and

practitioners who are capable of discussing, i.e. putting into language, their own practical experience. To a more varying degree, also depending on which field the artists belong to, these texts display new and unorthodox ways of reflecting. It is striking (but not surprising) how many of the research fellows fall back on well-known available forms. The main reason why this is no surprise is that it is difficult to develop one's own expressions and genres, and it may not be possible, therefore, to answer an unequivocal 'yes' to the question of whether the Research Fellowship Programme has succeeded in producing 'new forms of reflection and knowledge'. Perhaps the most discouraging finding is that few of the candidates have really succeeded in situating their projects within a larger reflection space, i.e. in a conceptual and theoretical universe. What is lacking, to put it briefly, is some concepts and theoretical perspectives that could help to link the concrete, personal experience with a bigger artistic discourse in a way that is not seen as external or academic. Here, we might have expected the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme to contribute more to the development of theory and conceptual work. Judging by the submitted reflection texts that form the basis for this article, however, work still remains to be done. Work on both theories and concepts, but also, and perhaps most importantly: the work of arriving at a mandate and a form for *the critical reflection*.

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