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## Writing as Research as Writing

When undertaking artistic research, artists dive into their own work and their own creative strategies. Often this research language is used as a way of visualizing, rationalizing, and even controlling this so called intuitive and embodied artistic process.

At the same time the artist hears voices in the making process that are not mirrored by the writing of research. The voices of stuttering, not-knowing or silence are very present in the work, but the artist is convinced that in the research language can not express these essential voices. Language and writing, let alone speech, create a fear in the artist, that is denied and suppressed whenever possible. Michel Foucault writes:

“A sort of dumb fear of (..) everything that could possibly be violent, discontinuous, querulous, disordered even and perilous in it, of the incessant, disorderly buzzing of discourse.”<sup>1</sup>

When we talk about artistic research and writing, we should inquire into the phenomenology of writing. To curb and repudiate the chaos and fear Foucault is referring to, we tend to use three assumptions in the use of language, which lie at the basis of the myths of writing.

First of all, we pretend that there is a direct line running from thought to writing or speech: you describe what you first thought. We therefore attach an inordinate amount of importance to planning for writing, to the linear writing process. In doing so we are denying that *a thought can alternatively arise from language and writing itself*.

Secondly we assume that there is a logical link between the individual experience and language. It seems so simple: you describe what you have experienced. Nevertheless, everyone knows how much your experience is coloured by your ideas, by your opinions, by your conditioning – yes, even by the words you use to describe the experience. Too often in our lives we believe more strongly in the description of our experience than in the experience itself. And yet in our artistic research we take on the firm conviction that we're capable of accurately putting what we have experienced into words.

The third assumption is that we think that, with language, meaning is transferred directly from the writer to the reader or from the speaker to the listener. This belief in a kind of logical communication is shattered, for instance, in the theatre, when we see that a written script can produce on stage an entirely different effect from the meaning it appears to possess in the text. As an audience for example, we are quite capable of being cheered up by a pessimistic statement.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Discourse on Language*, in: R. young (ed.), *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*, London: Routledge 1971).

These three assumptions force us again and again into a linear, logical and – above all – conscious writing process. At the same time there are a lot of inspiring examples of a recursive writing process that focuses less on planning and skirts the above assumptions. Thoughts arise from writing itself and not the other way around while writing produces knowledge instead of expressing it. Could a recursive writing process benefit artistic research?

In our daily work with MA- and BA-students of Higher Art Education we teach and assist theatre-students in doing artistic research. The knowledge the young artists are dealing with is threefold: embodied knowledge, process knowledge and experiential knowledge. These types of knowledge reflect different perspectives or positions of the artist: the body, the maker and the observer.

The current artistic practice of these young artists is getting more and more hybrid and polyphonic. Looking for research methods that mirror this polyphony of artistic practice we developed research tools, using the very *act of writing in a recursive way*. Writing in this particular way is not merely a *result* of the research, very often used as a way to disseminate knowledge, but a working strategy *during* the research, using creative and performative writing tools to awaken hidden voices, and to discriminate different voices within the artistic process as well as within the research process. Aspects of performative writing (monologue / dialogue / speech) and creative writing (free writing / imagination ) are used as working strategies within the artistic research process. The very act of writing becomes the research. Theoretically this way of working combines the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony of artistic production with cognitive knowledge on ‘writing process’-modelling.

The first technique we use with the theatre students is *free writing* as an artistic research tool. You write non-stop and read back as little as possible while you are writing. As an art form it is referred to as automatic writing and it was used by the surrealists in the 1930s. Free writing as a writing method was developed by Peter Elbow in his book *Writing Without Teachers*:

“ (...) only at the end you will know what you want to say or the words you want to say it with. Writing is a way to end up thinking something you couldn’t have started out thinking. (...) The real inefficiency is to beat your head against the brick wall of trying to say what you mean or trying to say it before you are ready.”<sup>2</sup>

You keep your hand moving, don’t look back, don’t rewrite or plan, or take any notice of legibility or spelling. Because you lose your rational control, various elements of the writing process are briefly switched. You no longer judge your own text and no longer think about the standards, resolutions or intentions you have or had. This leaves more room for associations, rhythm and unexpected images and thoughts. Free writing in the artistic research process is not used as a loosening up exercise, but as a way of generating thoughts and revealing voices in the artistic production, as for instance David Morley argues in his *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*, New York 1973, p. 14-15

<sup>3</sup> David Morley, *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing*, Cambridge 2007

Seeing speech as a preliminary stage of writing, free writing works as a transition from uncensored speech to uncensored written text. In this way the young artist discovers the topic and focus of the research by exposing assumptions. Knowledge is produced instead of described. The research topic for the artist seems clear, but very often the artist doesn't know what to really look for or what they know already or what is not known yet. Free writing gives voices to different perspectives or positions of the artist, one of them being the inner critic. An artist elaborating on doubts and stuttering, "writing about being unable to write"<sup>4</sup>, can reveal essential knowledge in the artistic research.

The second technique we developed together with theater-students is *doing interviews as a performative writing tool*. Writing is like speaking and speaking is a way of writing. Or, to put it another way, the writing process can progress far more smoothly when we view it as a conversation. The part of writing that is like talking is flexible because it switches more easily between the various elements of the writing process. The seemingly uncontrolled, chaotic character of speech is systematised in a reactive writing process.

Students of the Master Scenography of HKU Utrecht University of the Arts were asked, based on their own artistic research and their own personal research question, to interview another artist. The goal of the assignment is to open up the embodied knowledge of another artist and to use it to develop one's own artistic process. In the interview the focus is on the artistic process rather than on the artistic product. The student is asked to design this interview in such a way that it triggers the embodied knowledge and the experiential knowledge of the artist being interviewed. Interviewing a photographer who mainly makes photographs in nature probably is more fruitful when the interview takes place during a walk in the dunes. Interviewing a dancer could generate more knowledge having a dialogue while doing a dance improvisation together. The results in terms of language and knowledge are totally different from an interview format of two people sitting in front of each other.

The last technique we want to mention here is using *fiction writing* as an artistic research tool. Writing for instance a dramatic dialogue between the different voices within the artist, can improve the articulation of those voices and positions of the artist. And moreover it can produce knowledge on the interplay of those voices during the artistic process.

This polyphonic interaction and interplay between multiple distinct voices within the artist is lately seen more and more as a theory of creativity in itself.<sup>5</sup> Creative and performative writing tools as methodology in artistic research can help to reveal and articulate the creative process; writing as research as writing.

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<sup>4</sup> Elbow, P., *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*, Oxford University Press, New York 1986

<sup>5</sup> Deborah J. Haynes, *Bakhtin reframed*, London 2013; Fred Evans, *The multivoiced body*, New York 2008

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