

# Writing from within the creative process

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## Abstract

In this text we discuss the role of writing in artistic research and the importance of developing language, form and content that suits research in Fine Art, drawing from the Post Modern critique of Western epistemology. We search for a new kind of writing that accompanies the often uncontrollable creative process of art making. We choose to call this reflective writing.

By means of a text-production that accompanies the artistic process from within, it is possible to **write away** from the analytical distance that otherwise characterizes the (critical) art text, and that tend to render us a critic of our own art. We write ourselves **out** from academic traditions, using examples from our own artistic practices. The reflective texts are complemented by critical writing, typographically separated on the pages. Hence two levels, or layers, of writing are multi-vocally intertwined, contradicting and communicating in the same text. Writing out from within.

Is it possible to write the artistic process? I mean not on art, or about art, but from the inside of the very creative process, its phases and spaces in between, its ups and downs, and its sequences of flowing forwards and of blockage and loss... Process and change. Constant movement built by a series of standstills, tiny bubbles of "nows" together composing linear time. But isn't that an illusion? What if the linear form of the process really is something else? A shape we yet cannot grasp. Just like writing. It seems linear on the page, but suddenly you become aware of that the end really was the beginning, and that the blockage you left behind now appears to be the only way to go on...

Emma Göransson 2009

Weaving time  
threads flowing forwards and backwards  
forwards and backwards  
together composing space and time

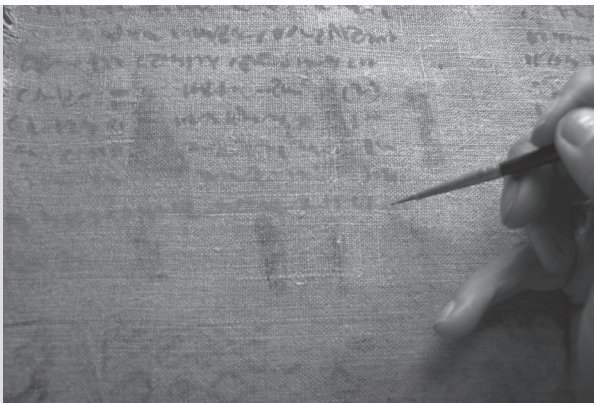
Here the wall-hanging begins  
here is the border and its definitive end  
circular time when the image  
is hung at the wall  
circulating around the room  
creating a limited space for action  
for us

The wall-hanging as text  
images telling stories  
we no longer recognize  
we do not remember the sounds of its content

we cannot read its signs

My hands working on the fabric  
brushing the paint away  
erasing the images to the point  
of non-existing  
almost vanishing  
this is the delicate moment when  
the image is beginning to end  
this is the moment of the material  
when the image is fading  
but still is possible to see

Brush, brush  
then wash the fabric in the lake  
over and over  
I search for this precise instant of the fabric



We live in Post Modern times. All 'Grand Theories' are deconstructed<sup>1</sup>, and instead we now are looking for multiple meanings, diversities and change. We search for spaces in between. There is no longer need for the order of things and discipline<sup>2</sup>. The controlling powers of systemization and finding Truth are not in focus anymore. We look for personal narratives, life stories, consciousnesses deriving from reflection in the changeable moment by a variety of voices<sup>3</sup>. Every voice is valuable, every story is needed...

If we let the Post Modern Critique influence the very core of the research within the artistic field, it is no longer possible to rely on old Modernist and Positivist epistemologies. We cannot hide behind fixated systems of interpretation, semiotic universes and theoretical frameworks that legitimize our production of art.

In this article, we will make a contribution to a new kind of artistic research that is open, ambiguous and personal. By the means of reflective writing, a kind of text-production that accompanies the artistic process from within, it is possible to write without the analytical

1. Payne & Schad 2003.

2. Foucault 1978, 1979.

3. Elam 1989, Spivak & Rooney 1997, Hannula 2005.

through my arms and hands I search  
through the pain in my body  
brush away and leave enough for the eye  
rinse  
brush and rinse

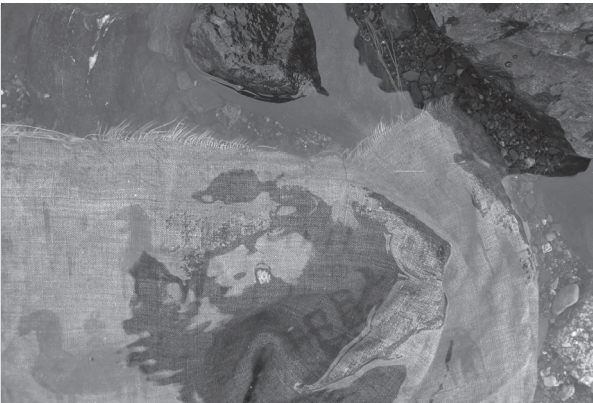
The water is cold today  
my hands are aching  
the wall-hanging now is incorporated  
into the landscape, into the lake  
my body aches me into the fabric,  
into the landscape, aches me time  
in my arms and hands I can sense  
the memory of when the fabric was planned and  
dreamed  
warp and theft, forwards and backwards  
the line of moments when I painted this image

and now when it is fading away

I try to recall the  
thousands of years when  
these stories were  
waiting to be told

Scrolls never opened and read to anyone  
circular moments  
now hidden and stored  
birth and death  
of a textile -  
time

Emma Göransson August 15<sup>th</sup> 2009,  
working on textile images in the lake Tåsjön,  
Jämtland, the north of Sweden



distance that otherwise characterizes the (critical) art text in general. We want to develop a kind of writing and a language, more suitable to creative processes in art than those given by academic tradition, that can complement the critical text.

Using only an academic or critical way of writing tends to render you a critic of your own art work. There is also a need to write *from within* the creative process, not just from the outside, analyzing, criticizing and evaluating it from a distance after it has been completed.

Reflection is a practice that can be useful in this searching for new forms of writing. Originally it means mirroring, something that is thrown back, or forwards, after meeting another surface, constructing another image/sound, similar to the original one but not identical. We can think of the reflection of a landscape upon the calm surface of a lake, or the echo of a voice producing another voice when it meets a mountain. The term may be problematic, since it in many aspects, it is based on a modern dualism<sup>4</sup>. It presupposes a me *out there* separate to a reflected me *in here*. However, if we try to ignore this separation, and focus on the multivocality and the multiple images that occur in the moment instead, reflection

4. Bolton 2008, p4.

There are pictures that are invading me: a boat that's burning, a tent and a suitcase. There is also a radio that is stalking me. These pictures are looking for connections to objects that are not used; old school wall charts that no one ever will look at again, bamboo sticks for the winter roads, stone blocks once a time carefully chosen, now they are no longer in use.

The pictures are falling into me. Where are they coming from? I build a tent with poles. Why?

September.

I want to place myself inside – not outside looking in. Everything is wet. I do not know, what this camp is: fragments, traces of action and preparations for something? There is a slow flood of tiredness that streams inside of me. Like the moment when you are still sunken in the night, and have difficulties waking up. As when the mist still hides the sun. The branches and leaves of the trees are caught by the moisture. The mist needs to lose its grip.

The camp is an ongoing project that cannot end. Time and space are not in a state of rest. With every new visit,

the space is different and shows another time line. I cannot get an answer every time. But there are always new questions, questions that look for meanings. Not meanings in the philosophical way, but meanings that originate from the space between the actions.

The decomposed, the wet, the green brown clay soil, the black burned boards from the boat are in some way analogous with this inner state of mine. My history, my memories, my insecurity, my need of confirmation.

I want to lie on the ground, on my back or crouch to a little mite. For some odd reason, I remember an old man in the apartment under us. He often used to cry in the middle of the night behind the curtains. The ground is damp and cold. The sun is warming me but the shadow takes away the warmth. A wish to sink down overwhelming me, I have to protect myself from the damp that steals my energy and that wants to enclose me in its depth. Crouching, becoming a mite and protecting the warmth – inside.

Once again there are pictures that are coming from my youth. It is the radio that I burned that recalls the memories, I bought it with the money from my first sum-



and reflexivity open up, and may become means, for increased awareness and deepening of the creative process itself.

Gillian Bolton has in her research elaborated ways of using reflection and reflective writing for professionals from a wide range of fields. She argues that:

Reflective practice is learning and developing through what we think happened on any occasion, and how we think others perceived the event and us, opening our practice to scrutiny of others[...]<sup>5</sup>.

She means that reflective writing can leap over the seeming gap between the personal and the professional self, and the supposed distance between the safe and rehearsed story and the dangerous new stories.

5. Bolton 2008, p7.

mer job. Was the action to burn it an attempt to cut off the umbilical-cord to the past? But it is impossible to cut off.

I have lost the steadiness of my hands after several years of administration. But my eye still seems to have its sharpness. I look at the paper – there is something that is not correct. And yet, in another way, it looks right; I have changed places of the objects on the paper. The picture has to follow its two-dimensional demands. Maybe this is an insight that I have been waiting for, too long.

My painter's gaze wanders around the arrangement. I try to find colours and colour relations. Maybe we could say light descriptions. Suddenly, in the work with the picture, I realise that the soil is not green brown but instead violet brown. The insight suddenly changes my impression of the site. The new colour scales originate from my wish to describe the expression of the site. The sweeping movements of the hands over the paper are like words in a text, but different.

My written reflections affect my way of seeing, and accordingly my manner to paint. I see in relation to the text. The reflective text takes me out of a rigid viewing.

Today I am going to sit in my tent, facing the place I was sitting in yesterday. The fog is lifting and the air is damp, a wind blows and the stream nearby flows with a remarkable variation in its murmuring. Small birds sing and a black grouse flies through the shrubbery like a Fury. The inside of the camp shows a view other than the one I get from the shrubbery. The front side has an ordered outline and makes a natural viewing point. But inside the perspectives are diverging against me and the back sides of the objects seem to be dissolving.

It is cold in the shadow and of the damp in the air. The autumn sunlight is caught by the shrubbery. With slow breaths my lungs are filled with cold air. The wind and the moisture create cold zones that wander over my face. Deep inside me there is an abyss. Is there a key in the burnt radio? Maybe I shouldn't have burnt it? Now it is just a rusty piece of metal. My memories, stuck in the cover of the radio, are gone.

Roland Ljungberg 2009 Järvnäset, Jämtland



If we bring this into the business of making art (research), we would like to add, that reflection also affects the very creative process itself. Opening to communication and meeting, both with a deeper aspect of yourself and with other people, inevitably changes you and your work. How this happens, and the results of it, is however impossible to predict and have theories on (control).

There are different kinds of reflective practice, of course. Reflective writing may be used as a free-flowing intellectual discussion on a subject, or as a means to make a research process conscious. Furthermore, reflection is always open and contains a quality of meditation, a searching for deeper levels of the creative process, of yourself and others, it explores silence and spaces in between. Reflection is spontaneous and personal – in different ways according to the taste, experiences, and moods of the writer/artist. It contains a quality of uncontrollability, of openness, and of fusion through the activity of silent awareness/observation.

Here we will share two examples from our own personal artistic practice with you readers:

Emma's text is from her on-going exhibition project at Jämtlands Läns Museum, Östersund, Skrud, (Shroud) - a contemporary art installation based on textile work, concepts of time, and writing, mediating personal and cultural memories. She makes use of text and reflective writing in several ways in the working process and in the planned final presentation at the Museum, planned next summer 2010.

Roland's text is from a project focused on a deep investigation of a series of mental images that have invaded his life and work. Here he makes use of reflective writing alongside and interwoven with the artistic process. He uses the results to develop ideas for other art projects, more directed to the art community. Writing is used as a way of sketching.

### Reflections upon the reflections

By this paper we want to discuss the role of writing in Fine Art research, and the importance of developing language, form and content that suit research in this expanding field. Special attention is given to the creative process, and the necessity to find a new kind of writing that accompanies this often uncontrollable process that involves most of your senses. We have chosen to call this reflective writing.

This type of writing may show important perspectives, issues or themes that are embedded in the personal commitment to the art process. Reflective practice may help us to be aware of why we work in a specific way. We become aware of prejudices and stereotypes, but we could also thereby find new dimensions in the artistic process itself.

What comes up in the reflective writing can, if we want, function as a starting point for other research methods as analysis, interpretation, theorizing and contextualizing. But it could also be looked upon as a way of sketching, thereby being a point of departure for further artistic activity. Besides being a tool in fine art research, reflective writing also may be used by professional artists in order to expand an awareness of their experiences and the possibilities of the artwork produced.

The two examples show how you may use writing and text interwoven in the artistic process from our own artistic practices. The texts are written in the moment, not controlled or edited in any way, and function as a kind of consciousness-aiming activity from within artistic practice. There is no ambition to explain or analyse the art work in this kind of text. It is simply composed by words that were allowed to come out when the art work was produced. The words differ according to personality, time and conditions at the moments of their production. Of course, reflective writing can, and sometimes must, be complemented by other kinds of writing, for instance critical writing, and, in fact, this is what is done here in this article. The bold text is the reflective one, and the ordinary one is the critical one. By typographically splitting up the texts on the pages, we show how two levels, or layers, of writing may be intertwined in the same text. This idea we borrowed from the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva in her innovative article *Stabat Mater*<sup>6</sup>.

6. Kristeva 1992.

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