

Ineffable Dispositions

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Writing, in other words (and here we don't have recourse to anything other than words), involves transposition. This text is composed of words that will have found their final places through numerous steps of editing. I will have written in fragments. The ensemble of words will have found its shape in a close relationship with my presence in distinct places, in different cities, in separate rooms. Right now I am sitting on a balcony in Bremen (and now as well). This sentence was born on a gentle summer evening on that balcony (the parentheses were added a couple of weeks later in Helsinki). Other sentences might be formulated on a chilly morning (actually today is that kind of day) or in the night, in a completely different mood, probably in some other place, perhaps even under an umbrella in an outside location. At the end of the day, only what remains counts. But the words will not cease to be fitted together again and again in the wake of layered acts of reading. In the process, recognisable tropes, argumentative modules, and gestures of ventriloquism start to strike sparks off one another. At some point, the afterlife of the text outweighs the history of its origins.

Since the matter of this writing is words, special attention should be drawn to those words from the outset. If putting words after one another in a carefully weighed order has the purpose of constructing or reconstructing a communicable movement of thought, it also involves a passage across something that might be called “positions,” local arrangements with relational particularity. In a word: it involves *transposition*. In the course of this movement, there will have been kinds of holds or footings followed by each other, since “trans-” is actualised in the middle of intervals, differences, and points of reference. Here, in this text, the relational arrangement is composed of words. Whenever the movement of thought, instead of being organised in chains of words, is arranged in another medial setting, different kinds of passage take place. When these passages, in turn, become a matter of verbal articulation, as is often the case at the border zone between the arts and academia, they might be called “intersemiotic transpositions” (see Jakobson [1959] 1992, 151). In the process, both “trans” and “position” have to be addressed in more detail.

The encounter between art and academia taking place in the variegated intersemiotic settings of artistic research makes us face two compelling issues: (1) The multi-dimensionality of sense. Sense cannot be reduced to meaning. Neither an author's verbalisable intentions (so-called subjective facts) nor discursively established interpretations (so-called objective facts) can serve as ultimate points of reference. All facts are made; they imply selection and reduction in regard to an excess of sense. (2) Non-human agencies. Artworks

have agency of their own. Artistic research gestures do not take place only on the level of (verbal) argumentation or thematic content; and they cannot necessarily be followed back to the author. Together these two issues hint at what Derrida calls the “graphematic structure” of communication (see Derrida 2000, 19). They point at the necessity of medial embeddedness and the iterability of all impartable sense and call for generalising the notion of writing. Artworks can become a site of a “revelatory negotiation” that highlights and weighs its own conditions of existence with regard to the prevailing horizon of communicability (Elo and Laakso 2016). Insofar as artworks have the capacity to effectuate shifts in perspective within various discursive formations, they can be said to function as “boundary objects” that change their ontological and epistemic nature depending on the context in which they are made operative (see Borgdorff 2012, 117).

These two insights result in a complication. Questions of writing and documenting, that is, various ways of articulating and converting sense, become questions of negotiation and legitimation. Here, we have to keep an eye on the multiplicity of senses of the word “sense.” Besides rationality and meaning “sense” refers also to awareness, feeling, and perception. What I call “articulating and converting sense” refers to processes that take place in all these registers of sense and between them. Against this background, the negotiations of sense at the interfaces of arts and academia—in Henk Borgdorff’s (2010) terms, “boundary work”—concern also the registers of sense and the questions of whether, how, and why some of them are prioritised over others.

In many Romance languages, the presence of the Latin *trans-* in the vocabularies of conversion of sense marks the process of moving from one domain to another: *translation*, *transmission*, *transmutation*, *transduction*, *transference*, *transposition*. A multiplicity of words is available for grasping something of the mode of conversion and its medial setting. This rich repertoire, however, incorporates culturally conditioned hierarchies. In a tradition where the written word has been for centuries the dominant form of reproducing sense, translation appears as the paradigmatic representative of these trans-operations. In many contexts, not least in those of research, the dominance of translation is hypostasised by the valorisation of signification and verbalisable meanings over other dimensions of sense, such as feeling. This legacy is present in variegated forms in the ideas of “culture as text” (Geertz) and “cultural translation” (Bhabha) and “translation as invention” (Latour). The term “translation proper” (Jakobson) referring to “interlingual translation” is particularly revealing. The Finnish word for “translating,” *kääntää* (literally, “to turn”), adds an interesting twist to the Romance scenario of trans-operations. It hints at a key element in translation as a trans-operation: in the process of passing from one language to another, something that is slumbering beyond the meaning-oriented chain of words comes to the fore, turns present, *kääntyy esiin*. This chapter will concentrate on pondering this “something” with regard to artistic research as transpositional activity.

ARTISTIC RESEARCH SYNDROME

My approach to transposition is informed by the hypothesis that an ongoing destabilisation of the culturally conditioned hierarchies between different dimensions of sense can be discerned through a symptomatic reading of artistic research activities. This starting point is necessarily selective and it can produce only partial diagnoses. From the chosen point of view, artistic research appears as a sensitive frame for testing various trans-operations and contesting the hierarchies between them. In a wider cultural theoretical context, the transformative potential of artistic research that is at stake here, is closely related to what Erich Hörl (2015) has outlined in terms of “displacement of sense” and to the ongoing re-evaluation of cultural techniques highlighted for example by Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (2013).

Hörl describes, with a media aesthetic emphasis, the displacement of sense in terms of an emerging object culture that operates in micro-temporal regions and makes use of cybernetic processes. In his exposition, this new culture ends up shattering the entire sense culture, which is based on processes of signification and a hermeneutic type of subjectivity (Hörl 2015, 3). Hörl’s account indicates the increasing cultural relevance of sense-making processes beyond linguistic signification.

In their critical account of the current state of cultural techniques, Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp (2013, 22) describe the discursive concept of culture in polemical terms: “the direction of our changing meaning of culture goes from technique to text, from things to symbols, from processing to interpreting.” They highlight the misjudging of the epistemic power of images, the disavowal of mathematical formalisms, and the lopsided focusing of media theoretical research on the relationship between orality and literacy as the essential features of this textual view of culture that was dominant until the 1980s (*ibid.*, 21–22). During the past few decades, however, the textualisation of our culture has reached its limits. Krämer and Bredekamp (*ibid.*, 23–24) note that the idea of culture-as-text is currently eroding at four frontlines at least: we are successively recognising that (1) culture-creating practices are fluid, (2) there are “silent processes” of knowledge, (3) notions of “mind” and “sense” need to be dehermeneuticised, and (4) imagery has an epistemological dimension. All four of these frontlines are strikingly familiar from the discussions around artistic research.

Krämer and Bredekamp summarise their account in the form of an explication of the different dimensions of cultural techniques. This concise passage is worth quoting here in its entirety, since it reads like a description of artistic research practices and thus highlights the key elements of the transformative potential of artistic research:

Cultural techniques are (a) operative processes that enable work with things and symbols; (b) they are based on a separation between an implied “know how” and an explicit “know that”; (c) they can be understood as skills that habituate and regularize the body’s movements and that express themselves in everyday fluid practices; (d) at the same time, such techniques can provide the aesthetic and

material-technical foundation for scientific innovation and new theoretical objects; (e) the media innovations accruing in the wake of changing cultural techniques are located in a reciprocity of print and image, sound and number, which, in turn; (f) opens up new exploratory spaces for perception, communication, and cognition; and (g) these exploratory spaces come into view where disciplinary boundaries become permeable and lay bare phenomena and relationships whose profile precisely does *not* coincide with the boundaries of specific disciplines. (Krämer and Bredekamp 2013, 27)

Point (b) is especially interesting with regard to the transformative potential of artistic research. Insofar as artistic research processes involve heightened sensitivity towards their own mediality (see Elo 2014a), artistic research can be seen as transpositional activity that tests and contests the criteria of the separation between “knowing how” and “knowing that.” It questions the conditions of explication—that is, processes of unfolding, foregrounding something with the help of something else. Point (b) also reveals the tensional relation between functionality and invention implied in all points of the quoted description. A cultural technique that works is a transparent vehicle for the operations it enables at the same time as it incorporates a certain opacity or friction that offer starting points for transformation and opens up exploratory spaces.

With this culture-theoretical scenario in mind, I consider artistic research practices as a set of transformative cultural techniques, that is, as operative processes that deliberately touch upon their own opacity. From the symptomatic point of view this set can heuristically be presented as a syndrome. Analogically to medical uses of the word “syndrome,” *artistic research syndrome* is a cultural condition characterised by a set of loosely associated symptoms. From the chosen point of view, all the symptoms concern shifts in the hierarchical relations of dimensions of sense: the crisis of theory-driven models of research and the revival of pragmatogonic research settings, the radical relativisation of human-centred conceptions of world, and the recognition of previously underestimated forms of cognition. The terms “symptom” and “syndrome” do not refer here to any features that might be seen as pathological. Rather, they signal that the “issue” or epistemological core of artistic research is not fixed and that it appears only indirectly at the intersections or boundaries of different contexts (see Borgdorff 2012, 120–21). Further, the symptoms highlighted point at the successive recognition of the medial embeddedness of what in the discussions around artistic research, under the pressure of the neo-liberal knowledge economy, is often called “knowledge production” (see Holert 2015, 281–84). They testify to the “mediality of sense” (Elo and Luoto 2014, 8).

To avoid a normative and limited view of the symptomatic phenomenon of artistic research it needs to be acknowledged that a privileged point of view from which the set of symptoms could be described in an objective way does not exist. “Artistic research syndrome” is a contingent constellation of symptoms that becomes readable only from selective points of view. In other words, the scenario that I am outlining here is a heuristic construction.

MAGICAL WRITING

Artistic articulations that are not based on propositional statements can gain the status of research only in a situation where the instrumental supremacy and functionality of the most widely established medium of research, that is, verbal language, has become radically questionable in its relation to other media. Until now, however, words have remained indispensable in the communicative processes of artistic research as well as in their theoretical and institutional framing. Even if artistic research clearly implies a transpositional horizon of writing beyond verbal language, it seems to me important to unfold the question of transposition from within verbal language in order to avoid blunt oppositional diagnoses of the symptomatics of artistic research.

For a symptom to appear, a certain sensitivity to the medium of its appearance is required. Walter Benjamin, who cultivated an extraordinary sensitivity to the medium of his thinking—the written word—offers a fecund point of reference for pondering the “artistic research syndrome” with regard to verbal language.¹ Benjamin’s letter from July 1916 to Martin Buber is a thought-provoking instance of his uncompromising ethos as a writer. In this letter, Benjamin gives a negative answer to Buber’s request for a contribution to the journal *Der Jude* (Benjamin 1994, 79–81). He explains why he refuses to write in this particular context at that point of time. His refusal is principled. For the theoretical concerns of the present text, it is necessary first to show how this decision stems from Benjamin’s peculiar understanding of the political potential of writing, and then to consider what kind of implications this might have when transposed into the context of artistic research.

Benjamin distances himself from a certain understanding of politically engaged writing that was dominant during the years of war in Europe. The critical issue for him is the use of words as a means of motivating action. His answer to Buber revolves around problematising the widespread opinion “that writing can influence the moral world and human behavior, in that it places the motives behind actions at our disposal” (Benjamin 1994, 79). In Benjamin’s view, Buber’s journal was about to adapt to this mainstream too well. The problem for Benjamin is that this widespread view of political writing takes for granted that political motivations can, and therefore should, be verbalised. This problematic starting point suggestively prepares the ground for motives of action, both in terms of their rationale and thematic scope. At the same time, it completely fails to see the possibility of a non-instrumental relation between language and action. Politically engaged writing guided by this kind of ethos, in other words, instrumentalises language. In the same gesture, action for which words prepare the ground for is rendered instrumental as well, since the use of language as a means of motivating action implies that goals can be put into action only within the realm of linguistic representations: “these motives can be discussed; others can be juxtaposed to them, and thus the action is

¹ It is plausible to consider Benjamin even as an artistic researcher *avant la lettre*. I have presented this argument at length in Elo (2014b).

(fundamentally) placed at the end as the result of an arithmetic process, tested from all sides” (Benjamin 1994, 80).

This kind of apparatus of political writing psychologises the political. In Benjamin’s view, its mechanism is that of a syntactical chaining of words that relies on understanding words as carriers of shared meaning. This apparatus knows writing only as the writing of something that lies both in the realm of the possible and that is compatible with what is generally argued for or against. In other words, it is an apparatus that determines the conditions of communication; it formats communicability. As Samuel Weber (2006, 604) notes, in contemporary vocabulary we can say that Benjamin formulates here his radical critique of “political correctness.” With regard to artistic research we might also interpret Benjamin’s critique of thematically political writing in terms of a critique of productivity. In light of Benjamin’s critique, writing that is meant to serve artistic knowledge production instrumentalises both artistic practice and its output, at the same time as it emphasises the value of linguistic representations. If the thematically political writing criticised by Benjamin psychologises the political, that is, narrows down the scope of the political, writing that focuses on serving knowledge production in artistic research—I am tempted to call this kind of writing *artistically engaged research writing*—risks losing touch with itself as a medium of transposition. It risks positing itself as the realm of explicitness—as the realm of “ultimate unfoldings,” as the etymological root, *explicitus*, implies. It risks numbing the feel of its own mediality and measuring itself against other, supposedly more opaque, modes of articulation. The distinctive character of Benjamin’s critique, its essential embeddedness in written language, underlines the importance of “media sensitivity” in the processes of explication (see Elo 2014a).

The alternative proposed by Benjamin is *magical writing*. Instead of being a means to something, magical writing is un-mediated (un-*mittel*-bar), it is its own medium. In contemporary vocabulary, one might call it “performative,” insofar as the term refers to the force and unmediated efficacy of bringing into being by writing (see Bolt 2016). Language may prove to be effective in many ways, but its efficacy, according to Benjamin, will never be essentially determined by transmission of content; it is conditioned by its self-relation that makes up “the purest disclosure of its dignity and its nature” (Benjamin 1994, 80). It is a question of “touch” (see Elo 2014a).

This emphasis on mediality echoes Benjamin’s language-philosophical reflections collected in his working notes stemming from the same year as the letter to Buber. In these notes, later published under the title “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” Benjamin summarises his philosophical account of language. Here, the term “language” must be understood in a broad sense. According to Benjamin, “every expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language” (Benjamin [1978] 2004, 62). His list of examples includes the languages of technology, justice, music, and religion (*ibid.*, 62). For Benjamin language is a historical process distributed in many kinds of medial settings, and it is characterised by a tensional relation between mediation and immediacy (Elo 2007, 143–67). On the one hand, language is liable

to processes of instrumentalisation. It tends to become a means of communication, that is, technics. On the other hand, by its own means, it is essentially communication or, more exactly, “imparting,” *Mitteilung* (Weber 2008, 38–44). Insofar as language communicates, it does so immediately; it is in this sense “magical” (Menninghaus 1995, 78). This polarity between technics and magic inherent to all languages (both verbal and non-verbal ones) becomes tangible whenever a language comes in touch with another language. Benjamin underlines that languages relate to one another; in all their differences they show a “peculiar convergence” (Benjamin [1968] 2004, 255). This implies that the task of translation emerges at the interface of two languages not only as the task of negotiating between their different ways of making sense but also as the task of constructing a viable relation between linguistic technics and magic.

This language-philosophical position informs Benjamin’s answer to Buber. The key idea of Benjamin’s “magical writing” that he also calls “highly political style” can only be understood against this language-philosophical background. Its concept is to “awaken interest in what was denied to the word [*das dem Wort versagte*]” (Benjamin 1994, 80). This is effectuated through “crystal-pure elimination of the ineffable in language” (ibid.). Instead of channelling the linguistic powers to a meaning-oriented chaining of words, magical writing plunges into the depths of language that words tend to fail to reach. Only where the “sphere of wordlessness [*Sphäre des Wortlosen*]” within writing reveals itself “can the magic spark leap between the word and the motivating deed . . . Only the intensive aiming of words into the core of intrinsic silence is truly effective” (ibid., translation adjusted).

In this short letter, Benjamin’s extraordinary sensitivity to the medium of writing comes to the fore in an exemplary way. It shows Benjamin’s “poetic art” to which he remained faithful in all his writings (Lacoue-Labarthe [1992] 2002, 12). In the letter, Benjamin not only describes his concept of magical writing but also performs it; he diverts his writing from the syntactical chains of meaning towards the “core of words” (Weber 2006, 605). This transposition is a passage towards that which individual words fail to say but nevertheless contain. Samuel Weber (ibid.) highlights the word “elimination” (*Eliminierung*) and points out that we need to read it literally to recognise that it includes the term *limen*, “threshold.” In light of Weber’s reading, Benjamin doesn’t use the word “elimination” in the sense of “getting rid of something once and for all,” but rather in the sense of pushing the limit, e-elimination. Consequently, the “crystal-pure elimination of the ineffable in language” involves a passage over a threshold of meaning actualised in syntactically ordered word strings, a passage into the core of words, into the sphere where words become mute. The effect of this passage is a kind of shortcut between different registers: what could not be said finds its place in writing. This operation does not, however, efface the ineffable. Furthermore, it makes readable something that actually was never written. With regard to the references that I have taken up earlier in this text, this might be called *intralingual boundary work*. As a transpositional operation of conversion of sense, Benjamin’s way of creating shortcuts between unfolded meanings and unspoken dimensions of writing destabilises culturally condi-

tioned hierarchies between speech and writing as well as different dimensions of sense. Benjamin shifts the emphasis from what might be called homeostatic tendencies of discourse to the diastatic processes operative in it—the rhythmic patterns, physiognomical details and infinite reconfigurability of sense. He does not eliminate the ineffable, he shifts boundaries of sense-making and thus prepares the terrain for artistic research as transpositional activity, or “writing,” beyond linguistic signification.

To sum up, Benjamin’s magical writing is not effective in terms of establishing a causal relation between language and action or within the horizon of instrumentality. Its efficacy consists in a passage into the sphere where words fail to signify what they nevertheless incorporate. This passage gives rise to a magical spark between word and deed; it is a performative spark, indeed. It makes the cultural technique of writing opaque by blurring what Krämer and Bredekamp (2013, 27) call the “separation between an implied ‘know how’ and an explicit ‘know that.’” This effect is never long lasting, but rather local, transient, and punctual. Whenever tangible, this magic effect complicates the criteria according to which we tend to posit oppositions such as content/form and figure/background. Even a clear demarcation between means and ends becomes impossible.

APPARATUS OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH

The theoretical implications of Benjamin’s “magical writing” to artistic research can be explicated here a bit further (even if further unfoldings might need to take place somewhere beyond words). As a way of doing this I will attempt a conceptualisation of artistic research beyond any limited disciplinary setting as a historically variegated apparatus consisting of technics, practices, and discourses. The conceptual move needed here finds its parallel in Giorgio Agamben’s way of expanding the Foucauldian notion of *dispositif*. For Agamben (2009, 14), an apparatus (*dispositivo*) is “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.” For him, the key issues at stake in such apparatuses are “processes of subjectification,” “humanization,” and “the possibility of knowing the being as such,” that is, construction of a world (ibid., 12–14). In short, an apparatus is an assemblage of material circumstances and technical arrangements that disposes—as the etymology of “apparatus,” *apparare*, “make ready for,” suggests—the phenomenal horizon of experience.

Against this background, the “peculiar convergence” of different languages that Benjamin writes of can be rephrased in terms of an inherent tendency of languages to assemble with each other into apparatuses. The approach suggested here involves considering the intersemiotic encounter between different modes of articulation in terms of an “assemblage,” that is, as a moment of reconfiguration through relations of exteriority, both material and expressive in kind (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 88 *passim*). This move highlights the

relevance and historical variability of the intersemiotic processes operative in artistic research practices.

A note concerning the relation between the notions of language and apparatus is needed, since both Benjamin's "language" and Agamben's "apparatus," serving here as the main points of reference, are rather plastic notions. For Benjamin, any kind of expression counts as language: in fact, "we cannot imagine a total absence of language in anything," not even in the world of things (Benjamin [1978] 2004, 62–63). Agamben, in turn, expands the notion of apparatus beyond the historical specificity of Foucauldian Knowledge/Power settings to include virtually all kinds of cultural techniques. In his exposition, verbal language turns out to be, in terms of its ontological effects (subjectification, humanisation, and construction of a world), a metonymic model of apparatuses in general (see Agamben 2016, 111–45). As such, it comes very close to Benjamin's notion of language—in so far as it concerns human beings.

It is important to note that both Benjamin and Agamben insist on the multiplicity of languages/apparatuses. As medial settings of sense they never appear alone, they are embedded in each other's co-appearance, they intersect and intermingle in multiple ways. Exposed to this multiplicity they are impure. In media theoretical terms relevant to artistic research, this condition has been described as a "post-medium condition" (Krauss 1999).

Benjamin's idea of "pure language" helps us find another footing for "linguistic purity" of the apparatus of artistic research. Benjamin ([1968] 2004, 257) emphasises that all languages aim in their own singular ways at one and the same thing. His term for this is "pure language"—a dimension of language that cannot be attained in any single, separate language, but only in the multiplicity of different languages mutually supplementing one another (*ibid.*). In short, "pure language" becomes a name for the origin of sense. "Origin" here, however, is not a ground or a stable point of reference. Rather, it is an eddy or maelstrom (*Strudel*) that brings heterogeneous elements together according to a logic that is historical (Benjamin [1998] 2009, 45). As sense-making apparatuses, languages are assemblages both in terms of their supplementary relations and in the sense that instead of speaking of things they speak on the same level as things they bring together. For Benjamin language is essentially *in medias res*; it participates in the world of things. His notion of language is both wide and abstract but "in no way metaphorical" (Benjamin [1978] 2004, 62). Deleuze and Guattari show a strikingly similar understanding of language in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For them, language is an abstract machine that does not appeal to any extrinsic factor. When conceived in terms abstract enough, a language machine is no longer a matter of verbal language only; it appears as the machinic aspect of the collective assemblage of acts, statements, and incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 87–91).

In short, language apparatuses are always impure; they are assemblages. This applies also to the language apparatus of artistic research. The imagined unity of it is an effect of its consistency, its capacity to originate sense. It makes up a "distributive unity," to use Peter Osborne's (2013, 122–23) apt term. Osborne

develops the notion in relation to the Kantian idea of aesthetic unity of experience—that is, a unity without any rational ground other than the fact of its practical continuity and contiguity. For Osborne, “distributive unity” is the “logical form of the historical unity of empirical forms”; it is a pragmatic unity (ibid.).

ARTISTIC RESEARCH AS A TRANSPOSITIONAL FRAME

During the past few years, “artistic research” has gained—rather pragmatically—the status of an overarching label referring to various research activities within the arts and art universities. In its broadest sense, the label refers to a wide range of research activities and approaches, for which the arts do not constitute the object of study but rather the practical and methodological terrain of research. In a more strict sense, it refers to a specific methodology or a field of research. In both cases, the question of its status as a discipline arises (Arlander 2014).

I prefer shifting the focus from questions of disciplinarity to dispositions beyond the logic of representation. Against the language-philosophical background discussed above, the apparatus of artistic research appears as a distributive unity of processes, technics, arrangements, material circumstances, regulations, and articulations that format the experiential horizon of artistic inquiry. With regard to this scenario, one of the key challenges of theoretical discussions concerning artistic research is to grasp this assemblage, this set of symptomatically related arrangements and agencies, in terms of its capacity to convert sense.² Attention has to be paid to the transpositional consistency of distributed processes instead of the proprieties of a conceptually or institutionally delimited field of research. This implies considering artistic research as a transpositional frame rather than a discipline.

To unfold further the idea of artistic research as a transpositional frame, a shift in the vocabulary is needed. In light of the analogy between thematically political writing and artistically engaged research writing discussed above, “artistic research” is a problematic notion. The problem lies in the qualifier “artistic” and its implied counterpart “academic.” The key issue is not whether particular research is “artistic” enough to qualify as *artistic* research or “academic” enough to count as artistic *research*. Supporters of this kind of view end up reproducing normative conceptions of art. The real question is, how to conceive a frame where multiple forms of inventive processes fostered in the arts can be recognised, discussed, evaluated, published, and developed further in terms of research. We need to divert our reading of the term from its disciplinary connections to the sphere of its dispositional surplus: the commitment to transform “knowledge production” into transpositional space or a “space of thinking,” as Michael Schwab (2012, 243) puts it. I emphasise that it is necessarily a question of *multiple* forms of research, not only because there are multiple

2 In Tuija Kokkonen’s terms this distributive unity can be seen as an experiential effect of “weak action” distributed across the divide human/non-human (Kokkonen 2017, 84–90).

arts, and not because different artistic research projects might recognise a vast range of motivations behind themselves, but due to the transpositional character of the whole constellation that I call “artistic research syndrome.” The very horizon of boundaries to be negotiated, tested, and contested is an effect of distribution and difference, and thus embedded in multiplicity. Further, as Benjamin’s idea of magical writing suggests, at points where practice and its motives are inseparable, artistic research takes place as an iteration of singular events, magical sparks.

MANIFESTOS

One of the key insights of the so-called “linguistic turn” was that thought is inseparable from language. What cannot be articulated in a language cannot be thought. The positivistic conclusion of this was to cut off from the scientific parlance everything that cannot be stated in clear terms. Continental philosophy, in turn, was urged to ponder the limits of conceptualisation within the medium of verbal language. More recently, in the wake of the so-called “medial turn,” questions of whether and how philosophical problems could or should be rearticulated in terms of medial embeddedness of sense beyond verbal language appear ever more compelling (Münker 2009, 7–29). Here, the borderline between a philosophy that reflects its own conditions of possibility beyond verbal language and artistic research that testifies to the philosophical tendencies within the arts gets extremely delicate. Being positioned at this borderline tends inexorably to turn into a question of commitment, choosing a task. Insofar as such choice is induced by a heightened sensitivity towards mediality of sense, as in Benjamin’s case, it becomes a question of style. Rather than a mere decoration, style, in the strong sense, involves essential intertwinement of the “what” and the “how” and commitment to work with the tension between these two. It is again Benjamin who offers us an apt formulation here. For him, “style is the jump-rope [*Sprungseil*] thought must take in order to push forward into the realm of writing” (Benjamin 1991, 202, as translated in Weber 2008, 115). In writing, thought must pull all its forces together, though without rigidifying into regularity. Style responds to this concentration of thought, offers hold, and yet at the same time stays loose in its recurrence like the skipping rope in the hands of the children swinging it, “always leaving room for the *Sprung*: the leap, to be sure, but also the crack,” as Weber (2008, 115) puts it. Insofar as thought “pushes forward,” the “what” and the “how,” in other words, never coincide. This transpositional tension is the demand of style.

According to Karl Marx’s famous slogan, the task of philosophy is not to explain the world but to change it. Marx and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) has been singled out as the text that sets the tone for this transformative ethos with its remarkable imaginative power and prophetic qualities (Danchev 2011, xx). It is no wonder, then, that this particular text has been a seminal model for artists’ manifestos. Its strategies and phrases have been recast and recycled in numerous artists’ manifestos of the twentieth century (*ibid.*, xxi). In terms of the imaginative power of words and phrases and its transformative

legacy, *The Communist Manifesto* figures also in Julian Rosefeldt's film installation *Manifesto* (2016).

Manifesto transposes a large number of historical artists' manifestos from their original contexts to that of a singular work of art. The words and phrases of the original manifestos are unchained from their semantic contexts and transplanted into new intersemiotic settings. In a series of twelve films, excerpts of the original texts are collaged into poetic monologues presented and embodied by the Australian actor Cate Blanchett. The result is a rich mixture of variegated gestures of interpretation, accentuation, recitation, indication, perversion, deconstruction, and parody that together revive the multifaceted reference materials, both textual and visual, in unexpected ways. The afterlife of the work overweighs the history of its origins.

Manifesto is not explicitly about artistic research, nor is it presented as artistic research. However, the strategies of displacing and collating the referential elements and composing them into the texture of the final presentation used in this work, *perform* the work as a transpositional arrangement that *could have been* pushed further and presented as artistic research. This distance in proximity cannot be appropriately measured in terms of any formal qualities, chosen methodologies, or institutional framing. It is a question of style.

Manifesto, even if it is not presented as research, reveals—regardless of its author's actual intentions—something essential of the function of words in artists' manifestos. At the same time as many of these words and phrases openly call to action, and in this sense tend to instrumentalise language, as Benjamin might say, they also perform a transformation of the horizon of action. Read through this Benjaminian lens, *Manifesto* demonstrates how writing becomes part of that horizon. As an intersemiotic assemblage it opens up an explorative space for experiential transformation where artworks appear as writing.

Darkness. A large exhibition space partly divided by walls with video projections. Spoken words discreetly fill the space. Recognisable tropes and unfamiliar ones are fitted together, again and again. I am involved in layered acts of reading. Right at the entrance: the burning and sparking fuse cord of a large firework rocket, in close-up and extreme slow motion. Hundreds of sparks out of focus, drifting away, until the rocket ignites in a spray of fire . . . Somebody says off-screen: "All that is solid melts into air. To put out a manifesto you must want: ABC to fulminate against 1, 2, 3; to fly into a rage and sharpen your wings to conquer and disseminate little abcs and big abcs; to shout, swear; to prove your non plus ultra; to organize prose into a form of absolute an irrefutable evidence. I am against action; I am for continuous contradiction: for affirmation, too. I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense" (Rosefeldt 2016, 5).³

Another screen further down in the exhibition space: A newsreader in a TV studio is waiting for the countdown before a live broadcast starts. She is checking her look and going through the texts of the different news items. She seems even to be rehearsing the lines

3 The line includes excerpts from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and Tristan Tzara's *Dada Manifesto* (1918).

quietly to herself. . . . When the managing editor ends the countdown, she starts reading her news with the typical voice of a newsreader. Intonation devoid of detonation. After a while she starts questioning a reporter via live conference. The questions concern originality and art. The reporter (embodied by the same actress as the newsreader) is standing under an umbrella in pouring rain reporting live from an outside location: “Art does not come from ‘nowhere’ or for that matter anywhere. Creativity does not pop into the head. There are grounds, forces, powers that create and make art a hazardous journey of leaps, crevasses, errors, daring and courage” (ibid., 49).⁴

If artistic commitment involves exposing oneself to a “hazardous journey of leaps,” in turn, it is tempting to see one of the key characteristics of a commitment that is “academic” in something like “the willingness to engage oneself in critical discussion with peers.” Associative freedom contra argumentative rigour. In terms of the transpositional demand of style, any demarcation between these two is, however, a rather complicated matter, since context is never only an external factor; it is also at work from within an endeavour, be it “academic” or “artistic.” Rosefeldt’s *Manifesto* stages this entanglement. It manifests that art and research show peculiar convergence: as transpositional activities, they relate to each other like the inside and outside of a glove; they are incongruous with one another. They show the most intimate relationship of reversibility, even though they cannot occupy the same space—except when they strike sparks off each other as writing.

As transpositional activity, artistic research, in other words (and otherwise than in words), involves writing—magical, to be sure.

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