

ESSAYING ART: PRACTICE TUTORIAL ARTISTIC RESEARCH

THE FOUR THEMES:

These four words are core characteristics of the essay form. These characteristics are connected to both the artistic and the academic. The essay inherently embraces both the artistic and the academic, it drifts between the subjective and the objective, the experiential and the intellectual. The essay follows a train of thought, and critically reflects on those thoughts: it experiments and speculates, without the need for a conclusion. As I don't want to restrict it to a method by formulating a process, or setting rules, I choose to give a set of four commitments which can be used in any way possible. We will use these core characteristics of the essay as themes to discover and develop artistic strategies of researching. The output of this approach can encompass all possible artistic mediums, and all possible combinations of artistic mediums. Formulations form by eclectic stealing, influencing, composing, collaging, collaborating, and associating. The four commitments create a setting and atmosphere for the students in which to experiment, be critical and feel the freedom to speculate.

Unfinished-

The concept of the "unfinished" challenges the idea of "knowledge production", because what is being produced is not a concrete product or result. It encounters the problem of capitalization. The essay is inherently unfinished as it is a thought process and constantly questions and reflect on itself. Café Chercher is a setting in which the idea of presenting artistic research is combined with the demand that it is not finished. What does being "unfinished" mean to you?

Definition OED

un-, *prefix*

1. Expressing negation.

negation, *noun*

1. a. An act of denial; a negative statement, doctrine, etc.; a refusal or contradiction; a denial *of* something.

1. b. The making of a statement involving the use of a negative word, as 'no', 'not', 'never', etc. (freq. in *Linguistics*); contradiction of a statement or allegation; denial, rebuttal, nullification. Also with *of*.

1. d. *Computing*.

A logical operation that converts a statement, proposition, or truth value from true to false or vice versa

critical state *noun*. the state of a substance when it is at its critical temperature and critical pressure.

finished-

1. a. *trans*. To bring to an end; to come to the end of, go through the last period or stage of. Often with gerund (formerly with inf.) as object: To 'make an end of', cease (doing something). †Also, *rarely*, To put an end to, cause to cease.

Theoretical underpinning:

using Borgdorff's (2014) "Unfinished Thinking in and through Art."

Critical

Critical (Theory) is perhaps the first thing that we think about when talking about Adorno and the essay. But critical is also it also relates to "critical making", "critical thinking" and to "thinking as a gesture". Being critical can mean a lot of things and the word is used in a lot of different contexts. Etymology can also be used as a tool to create a critical attitude towards the (artistic) language we use. To be critical implies (self-)reflection and critique, a re-evaluation of questions and answers. It implies a scepticism. One of its problems is that it implies an intellectual approach, but there can be emotional criticalities or physical criticalities. What does being "critical" mean to you?

Definition OED

critical-, *adjective*

†2. Involving or exercising careful judgement or observation; nice, exact, accurate, precise, punctual. Now *Obs.* (or merged in other senses).

5. Of the nature of, or constituting, a crisis:

b. Involving suspense or grave fear as to the issue; attended with uncertainty or risk.

7. *Math. and Physics*.

b. *Nuclear Physics*. Of a nuclear reactor: maintaining a self-sustaining chain reaction; esp. in phr. *to go critical*, to reach the stage of maintaining such a reaction. Also *transf.*

critical state *noun*. the state of a substance when it is at its critical temperature and critical pressure.

Theoretical underpinning/ literature:

Adorno and Horkheimers critical theory as formulated in "Dialectic of enlightenment" (1940-50), Hartle and

Lijster (2016) “Kunst van Kritiek, Adorno in Context”, H. Hogan (2012).

Experiment

Experiment in science is used for concrete and repeatable outcomes. But experiment can also be used as the exact opposite, as a way of trying out new things. Max Bense puts emphasis on the experiment when talking about the essay: "For whoever criticizes must necessarily experiment; he must create conditions under which an object is newly seen, and he must do so in a fashion different from that of a creative author. Above all the fragility of the object must be probed, tested; this is precisely the meaning of the small variation that an object undergoes in the hands of its critic."- The experiment in this definition implies a re-editing and re-doing, a re-trying, even after apparent failure. Creating new combinations and settings in order to find things we can not predict. What does “experimenting” mean to you?

Definition OED

The French assai, as well as the English assay, come from the late Latin word *exagium*. *Exagium* refers to the weighing of a coin to test the weight, and is used in a wider sense of “examination, trial, testing”, and as “a balance”. The word experiment arises in the middle of the fourteenth century, meaning: an “action of observing or testing, test or trial”. It descends from the Old French *experiri* (to test, to try).

Theoretical underpinning/ literature:

Goethe’s (1792) “the experiment as mediator of subject and object” (translation 2010), Peter J. Burgard (1992), “The essay as Form” by Adorno 1958, Rheinberger’s (2012,2015) “experimental epistemology” and “experimental systems” in relation to M. Schwab’s (2013) “Experimental systems in Artistic Research”.

Speculative

Speculating is on the borderland of the un-truth, of the hypothetical but departs from the now. It implies a contemporaneity that attempts to perceive possibilities that are not visible yet, thinking the unthinkable. We can use “equivocation” and “ambiguity” (Sarah Pourciau, 2007) as a way to speculate, or bold statements, “bold conjectures” or “bold hypothesis” (K. Popper, 1935). But also the strategy of “over-interpretation” (A. Johansson, 2013). The speculative “observes” and attempts to imagine what we can not imagine yet. What does “speculating” mean to you?

Definition OED:

speculative-, *adjective and noun*

1. **a.** Of persons: Given to speculation; inclined to theorize or indulge in conjectural reasoning.

†**c.** Given to pry or search *into* something. *Obs.*

speculate, *verb*

a. *trans.* To observe or view mentally; to consider, examine, or reflect upon with close attention; to contemplate; to theorize upon

speculation-, *verb*

1. **a.** *trans.* To observe or view mentally; to consider, examine, or reflect upon with close attention; to contemplate; to theorize upon.

†**2. a.** The exercise of the faculty of sight; the action, or an act, of seeing, viewing, or looking on or at; examination or observation. *Obs.*

2. †**b.** Observation of the heavens, stars, etc. *Obs.*

3. †**b.** An observer or watcher; a spy. *Obs.*—1

4. **a.** The contemplation, consideration, or profound study *of* some subject.

Theoretical underpinning/ literature:

Lars O’Erickson “Meta-fact” (2004) using “paradgmes shifts” of Khun and “bold statement” of K. Popper., G. Agamben (2007) “What is the contemporary?”, Sarah Pourciau, (2007), A. Johansson (2013)

