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The artists' text as work of art

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Introduction

I had gotten used to getting my texts back heavily edited, comments in the margin, red lines and yellow marks covering the pages. Dreading the editor's notes, I also grew to know their argument by heart: your writing is hermetic: your tendency toward the poetic conceals the object from the reader's view. The first time I read these remarks I was taken aback and preoccupied by them for several days: apparently there were strict rules an essay or review had to correspond to. Regardless of whether my texts really were poetic, couldn't they have a phrasing, rhythm, and logic of their own? Weren't there more ways in which an object could be perceived, and further, a way to translate one's critical distance to an artwork into words?

Rewriting my pieces I found a secret joy in renegotiating what I experienced as textual standards while remaining true to my wording and writerly pace: how could I rework my writing within a system the apparent strictures of which I didn't entirely agree with? How could I safeguard my language and choice of terms while unpacking my thoughts, which concerned not only the object on view, but also the language in which my view on it could be transcribed? Editing the editing, I wondered whether my stakes were too high for the small article I was supposed to write. Was that the reason why my piece had been judged too closed and introspective? And what did the term "poetic" actually mean in relation to my writing on visual art?

My initial surprise at the nature of the comments on my articles never went away. It only grew, evolving into a question I knew I'd have to confront. This moment came when the artists whose projects I had been discussing in my texts started to write. Questions regarding the translation of the object at hand deepened: how could I write about writing? What did my position as a "critic" enhance once the artists I was interested in put pen to paper? Jill Magid, Jeremiah Day, Josef Strau, Dora García, Nicoline van Harskamp, Falke Pisano, they wrote and published their writings as autonomous works. And these artists were not the only ones to articulate their thoughts: the number of visual artists writing and publishing their texts started to increase. The character of their works differed, varying from novel to script, verging on theoretical writing, essay, poem, diary entry, journalistic report, and, most often, a combination of these forms. What was the common denominator of these writings? What were their key characteristics? And how could artists' texts be approached?

For the purposes of this research, I define artists' texts as texts written and produced by visual artists. The heightened quantity and expanding complexity of contemporary artists' texts prompt questions regarding their

institutional positions and the operative force. How can artists' writings be situated in art practices marked by a strongly developed and still developing discursivity?

The phenomenon itself of visual artists writing and publishing their words is not new.[1] Language has attracted artists from Salvador Dalí to Theo van Doesburg, from Wassily Kandinsky to Henri Matisse.[2] But especially since (Proto-)Conceptual artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s radically exploited an art unrestricted by medium, language has been employed in a "visual" art practice in a more conscious way.[3] Words were often visualized and utilized as material by artists.[4] For others, the indeterminacy of language, abstaining from clear referentiality, and made to operate "between literal and metaphorical signification" [5] was activated in texts that paradoxically communicated to museum audiences what was not visible within the confines of its walls. This dual reliance on language as both matter and not matter might be characteristic of the period.[6] It certainly also points to the attempt at what Peter Osborne has rightly termed the "fundamental *transcategorical* practice" of the day, or a post-Conceptual ontology of art in general.[7] The mere use of language reminded the viewer that artistic motivations were led by an *idea* supposedly less tangible than so-called traditional art (i.e., painting and sculpture).

Confronted with contemporary artists' writings, especially at the beginning of my research in 2010/2011,[8] the problem of categorization and its relation to individual works persisted.[9] Institutions were struggling with models to present written pieces in an exhibition setting, questioning how to discuss them. Thus books were put on a pedestal, favoring their object status at the expense of the written structure they also deployed: the mere form of presentation withheld the possibility for Justin Gosker's book *Ummm…* (2012), containing poems and aphoristic phrases, to be leafed through, let alone read. Nor could it be bought.[10] Likewise the physical and mental distance between Mariana Castillo Deball's 2002 rewrite of George Perec's posthumously published *Penser/Classer* (1985), with which it shared a title, and the onlooker could not be overcome. Merely placed on a counter, the intimacy and immediacy of the artists' writing could not be grasped, nor could its translation in physical space be comprehended.[11] On other occasions the artists' writings were accessible. But the limited edition and mode of distribution for these writings based on a gallery system still often steeped in the uniqueness of a work of art, did not correspond to the objective proper to most written works, if only as a principle inherent in a printed publication: to be multiplied and read! While I was anxious to study Jill Magid's *Becoming Tarden* (2010), the artist's gallery did not answer my repeated requests

for a copy, apparently more interested in dealing a lucrative installation; Melvin Moti's *No Show* (2004) was impossible to obtain, as it lingered between museal production, self-published booklet, and extension of the film *No Show*; Maria Barnas's *The Writing Room* (2007), a newspaper, had to be handled with gloves in the museum's library, its shop lacking an edition.

Today, much like in the 1960s, the conditions for the reception of artworks are challenged by the appearance of a written piece in an exhibition space. The discrepancy between multiple temporalities must be faced. A museum generally follows the clock time usual for institutions. But the reading of a narrative work such as Keren Cytter's *The Seven Most Exciting Hours of Mr. Trier's Life in Twenty-Four Chapters* (2008), which will be discussed in the first chapter, would take you well outside the exhibition's opening times. On other occasions, the uneasy incongruity of time frames is both stressed and tacitly maintained, allowing for the publication to be taken home.[12] These conflicting temporalities cause practical problems, showing up an institution's functional standards, conceptions, and efficacy.

A current use of language in artists' texts marks a difference from its historical use in Conceptual Art. Language is no longer assumed to be an instrument to circumvent the problematic status of the art object. The present-day generation of artists' writings that are studied in my research see language as *not* neutral, *not* "aiming at the suspension of the conflictual basis of discourse." [13] Educated with and well aware of Conceptual Art and post-structuralist thought such as Barthes's, on which Conceptualists so heavily relied,[14] today's artists witnessed the failure of a Conceptualist project intent on keeping the market at bay through the use of what they perceived as transient, ephemeral language. Or as art historian and former advocate of Conceptual Art Lucy Lippard formulated her experiences of the time, major Conceptualists were seen selling their works "for substantial sums," being represented by and showing in the "world's most prestigious galleries." [15] Language had clearly not been an efficient tool to bypass the commodity status of the object and the market-driven orientation of the time, it being strongly intertwined with the world of which it forms an indelible part. Or to frame it differently, for the current generation, Jacques Derrida's famous adage "There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]" had to be taken with a pinch of salt.[16] Or at least nuanced.

Working in the aftermath of Conceptual Art, contemporary artists, especially those since the 2000s who I focus on in this research, have

nevertheless become habituated to reflecting on the functioning of the text *qua* text. Employing language now, the question arises how this textual consciousness is spelled out in artists' writings, inquiring into the status and operative force of the artists' text.[17] It is my intention to situate artists' writing more precisely in relation to Conceptual Art and to apprehend its functioning given a still prevalent institutional frame predicated on visuality. In order to do so, I will choose what is historically often regarded as the opposite pole of visuality, concentrating on the textuality of the text. In the artists' text and my study if it, the visual and the textual are not treated as antinomies, however. It is my premise that an awareness of the text *as a text* is translated into textual strategies that effectuate the transformation of the word in a written work. What Roman Jakobson called literariness (*literaturnost*) is immanent in the artists' text, as it's writing that stands out from habitual uses of the written word.[18] My study of this textual awareness thus engages in a poetics, which answers the question: "What makes a verbal message a work of art?"[19] Subsequent chapters will trace these inherent textual procedures. To do so the artists' text will be (temporarily) isolated, severed from a visual practice to which it is (possibly) linked. The reason for this separation is that the artists' writing circulates in a detached and autonomous manner as well as tied to its visual counterpart. What is more, the artists' text is all too often perceived as an extension of a visual or visually oriented practice. As an assumed logical, often causal connection, the visual-textual dichotomy seems to entrench the artists' text in institutional constraints it immanently escapes and contests. It obscures what is actually at stake in the text *as a text*.

Following textual procedures of the artists' writing that, according to me, mark the text, the artists' writing is read up close and compared with literature. Thus four themes seminal to artists' writing are studied in four case studies that exemplify what I despite (or thanks to) the earlier mentioned variety of artists' writings still call *the* artists' text. For reasons of clarity, they will be treated separately, though they actually overlap. The themes and case studies consolidate the multiple artists' writings and variegated texts.

Variations notwithstanding, the criteria guiding my selection of artists' texts, not disregarding my personal preference, were: contemporary having gained an autonomous status, i.e., reflecting on its textual self and (also) circulating unconnected within a so-called visually oriented institutional frame; a consistent part of the artists' practice; and not yet fully integrated (by 2000) in the dominant institutional discourse. Although writings like that of Maria Barnas or Tom McCarthy continue to be of importance, they were less suitable to be among my objects

of research given recognition and categorization emphasized the institutional embrace and overshadowed the mostly obscured poetical strategies (the reflection on the text as *a textual becoming*, that is) in which I am interested here. The limit cases are intriguing due to their unsure and unsecured position, which often underlines an overt experimentation with textual fringes, a manipulation of borderlines, bargaining and crossing frontiers that make up the work. For the same reason, I am less interested in the notion of genre, as it directly qualifies and encapsulates a practice that seems willingly erring. Lastly, the writings had to differ from each other in ways that, at first sight, seemed significant. Thus Matthew Buckingham's shorter "article" "Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name" (2005, 2007, 2008), discussed in the fourth chapter, seemed to stand miles apart from Cytter's full-length "novel" *The Seven Most Exciting Hours of Mr. Trier's Life in Twenty-four Chapter*s; Dora García's heavily fragmented and collaborative artists' writing seemed to differ considerably from Josef Strau's text, in which the first person singular, or "I" protrudes.

Accordingly, chapter one, taking as its point of departure Cytter's work mentioned above investigates the narrative lines of the artists' text, comparing it with postmodern literature. The second chapter, delving into Dora García's *The Inadequate* (2011), examines the form of the artists' text, reading it against the notion of metafiction. The third chapter inquires into the position of the author, juxtaposing Josef Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence* but *W.H.C.T.L.J.S.* (2008) with autobiography/ autofiction. The final chapter asks after the functioning of the single word in artists' writing, studying Buckingham's work "Muhheakantuck," seeking possible parallels with poetry, and conceptual writing as a branch of poetry specifically.

Conceptual Frame

Confronted with current artists' writings, it is my aim to comprehend the functioning of the text *as a text*, and its relation to Conceptual Art specifically, situating it in an institutional (theoretical) discourse. Reading and rereading artists' writings, I found that literary theory revealed itself as insufficient to grasp the artists' texts' operative force. Whereas artists' writings seemed to rub shoulders with postmodern approaches concentrating on what in relation to postmodern practices has been termed the textual surface, I suspected their motivations lay elsewhere. But where? And how did these incentives materialize, if at all? Thus repeatedly coming across metatextual comments in the artists' text, I was wondering what premises underpinned these procedures that are

reminiscent of postmodern textual strategies.[20] To what degree did a predilection for *petites histoires* in artists' texts like Buckingham's differ from or respond to postmodern renunciations of grand narratives? [21]

Searching for a way to analyze artists' writing, I suspected that its complex situation, "between" traditional disciplinary domains, had to be accounted for. I quickly discovered that its conspicuous visual art support did all but act as a negligible décor. But how could the ramifications of influences implicit in artists' writing be methodically explained? My modus operandi had to allow for a study of the *sinuosity* and *implacability* of the artists' text. This led to a reconsideration of my initial empirical address of the artists' text. I took up an approach to empiricism, as accounting for the experience of influences (impressions and reflections differing from each other and repeating each other) coming from the outside, intertwining it with a patchwork of different techniques, thus responding to the artists' text's branching out, forking among, and position *between*.

Today's artists' writings aren't neutral writings like Conceptual artists' texts. Current artists' writings do not seek to outplay or baffle the paradigm of visual art. Part and parcel of my quest for an approach to the artists' text was the question of how this lack of neutrality could be methodically carried out in my research. Artists' writings seemed to be *produced with* the complex milieu that brought them forth, a tangled web of social, machinic, and mental interrelations. Conscious of artists' writings complicity in economic mechanisms and means—be they institutional systems or the ever more intricate media and cybernetic network on which society is based—the term production has to be understood here not solely as an economic configuration. In relation to the artists' text, production seemed to be a composite unity of forms of life including social relations and political and cultural operations closely linked to their material environment. I asked myself how these elements impinged on the artists' text, as they appeared to mingle and seep into each other. Issuing from a context that is composite in itself, I proposed the diversified artists' text could only be grasped through a *transversal* reading of it, i.e., taking into account its crossing several domains.[22] How does the artists' text realize what surfaced as an intra-active writing, it being marked by a position *between*? [23] How does artists' writing take a stance vis-à-vis an apparently stable and so-called canonical field, an institutional framework to which it looked likely to respond while (re) configuring it?

In order to grasp the functioning of the artists' text and its immanent complexity, I combined empirical research with a conceptual architecture. This combination is key to circumscribing the artists' writing, and

provided a method by which I could follow each and every, what so far seemed capricious, textual move. Crucial to my framework for cracking open the artists' text's has been my study of the notion of *dissensu*s in an analysis that compared the writings of Jacques Rancière and Félix Guattari. Whereas Rancière's work deepened an understanding of the image-text divide that dictated, and, to me, concealed discussions about artists' writings, Guattari's offered an approach that made do with these (and other) all too familiar established distinctions. Let us briefly look at the Rancière-Guattari debate.

Rancière's comprehension of *dissensus* pivots around his initial investigations of the image, interesting in relation to the way artists' writing is still comprehended along the image-text divide. For Rancière, the image is heterogeneous, and, as such, grounded in what he calls "the great parataxis" [*la grande parataxe*]. The great parataxis consists of "a great chaotic juxta-position, a great indifferent melange of significations and materialities" where " all common terms of measurement that opinions and histories lived on have been abolished."[24] It is the common factor of dis-measure or chaos that gives art its power, according to Rancière. A contradictory tribute to history is being paid, as he himself admits: "The measurement of aesthetic art then had to construct itself as a contradictory one, nourished by the great chaotic power of unbound elements, but able, by virtue of that very fact, to separate this chaos—or 'idiocy'—from the art of the furies of the great explosion or the torpor of the great consent." Rancière then proposes to call this measurement the "sentence-image" or "la phrase-image": "By this I understand something different from the combination of a verbal sequence and a visual form… The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible. By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically—that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relation between text and image."[25] It is what Kant called the "aesthetic idea" of art, "inventions that transform the willed and the unwilled, the known and the unknown, the fact and the non-fact."[26] An approach to historical disciplinary categorizations, the question arises whether the sentence-image enables the localization of artists' writing, grasping its textual becoming *with* a world of which it partakes.

Rancière debunks the dualities of text and image, time and space, tracing the conditions and assumptions underlying representation, his reconfiguration remaining a strictly aesthetical one. This aesthetical rearrangement is elaborated on in his later work, where he proposes to term the reconfiguration of historical demarcations another "distribution of the sensible." What needs modification, Rancière explains, is an "a *priori* distribution of the positions and capacities and incapacities attached to these posi-

tions."[28] His proposition is a political one. The dialectics of active and passive are challenged, positing that "emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting, when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection."[29] What is then formulated as a refusal of radical distance, of the distribution of roles, and of the boundaries between territories, allows for "a reconfiguration in the here and now of the distribution of space and time, work and leisure." [30]

This dynamic can be reframed in what Rancière termed "scenes of dissensus." What *dissensus* means for Rancière is another organization of the sensible, "where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought," Rancière continues, "is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of capacities and incapacities." This allows for the "employment of the capacity of anyone whatsoever, of the quality of human beings without qualities." [31]

Rancière's reconfiguration "of space and time, work and leisure," and its cry for "idiocy" and chaos from *which it resurrects itself* seem of importance in relation to the artists' text.[32] Like Rancière's view on dissensus, the artists' writing starts from the thesis that language can simultaneously designate and reconfigure the world. Confronted with Rancière's reconfiguration or the proposed aesthetical regime, what strikes one is that it ultimately excludes the "idiocy" on which it is grounded. Striving for a rearrangement, the dissensus it implies is recomposed, the aesthetical regime in which it results seeming to bar existence or "bare life" from playing a part. Rancière's ontology is rationalized in its exclusion of the preindividual, bare life or being. It is staged and exclusive at that, arguing from a rational individual and already individuated being. For Rancière, artistic inventions verify the ontology that renders them possible, since they place "one sensible world in another: the sensible world in which the imagination obeys the concept, in the sensible world in which understanding and imagination relate to each other without concept." The ontological principal is based on equality and has "no other consistency than that it is constructed by these verifications." [33]

The extent to which Rancière's approach to the ontology of his aesthetic regime is restricted becomes apparent when his notion of *dissensus* is juxtaposed with Guattari's. Guattari states, "rather than looking for a stupefying and infantilizing consensus, it will be a question in the future of cultivating a *dissensus* and the singular production of existence".[34] Guattari's aesthetic paradigm implies a transversal way of thinking, experimentation with new relations between the three ecological registers he defines, in this case: the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity. Through an ethico-political articulation, or ecosophical perspective a "reequilibration of the capitalist semiotic Universe" will be brought about.[35] To realize this revolution, one "must not be exclusively concerned with visible relations of force," but "molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire" have to be taken into account as well.[36] A gentle revolution is proposed, summoned forth by *a-signifying ruptures* at the heart of ecological praxes. These a-signifying ruptures are the catalysts for existential breaks, creative repetitions or "existential refrains" enabling virtualities (incorporeal objects, abstract machines, and universes of value) to "make their presence felt."

Allied with an "expressive support," *dissensus* allows here for a processual reactivation of "isolated and repressed singularities" that are "turning in circles," Guattari argues. This practice is an aesthetic one. For Rancière, by contrast, *dissensus* has no voice of its own, being re-inscribed in the "equal inventions of a common capacity in a common language." [37] Whereas Rancière's aesthetic regime is based on equality and homonymy, presupposing existence, Guattari's is grounded in the heterogeneous, aiming at overturning prevalent modes of living, action, and thought. Whereas Rancière's space for thought and action takes place in the gap *dissensus shows*, without being it, Guattari proposes the "gap" itself to be activated. For Guattari, Rancière's action would be an orchestrated one in the end, obeying language construed as a common language, thus following the "capitalistic semiotic Universe" he, Guattari, intended to challenge and change. "The crucial objective," Guattari underlines, "is to grasp the a-signifying points of rupture—the rupture from denotation, connotation and signification—from which a certain number of semiotic chains are put to work in the service of an existential autoreferential effect." [38] What matters is what he calls a *heterogenesis*, or a process of "continuous resingularization:" a becoming that is "always in the process of adapting, transforming and modifying itself in relation to its environment." [39] This can be articulated in the form of "a nascent subjectivity," "a constantly mutating socius" and/or "an environment in the process of being reinvented." According to Guattari: "we need new social and aesthetic practices, new practices of the Self in relation to the other, to the foreign, the strange." In this manner, new techniques and procedures can be invented and put to work, new forms of expression and life, other forms of organization and reinventions of

the subject of enunciation that produces utterances. He further explains: "It is important not to homogenize various levels of practice or to make connections between them under some transcendental supervision." [40] Homogenization is reductive. Reasoned from an ecosophical perspective it is precisely this homogenization that is at stake in Rancière's aesthetic regime. Based on Kant's aesthetic idea of art, it does not want to spill over into ethical concerns, Rancière's aesthetic regime states. In relation to contemporary artists' writings I doubt whether a Rancièrean aesthetical agenda that can be perceived as a silencing and immobilizing one in the end, is a fruitful and effective approach. In my analyses of the texts of Cytter, García, Strau, and Buckingham I further elaborate on the point.

Context

Artists' writings seem untimely, or at least at odds with the environment in which they appear and which produces them. Much contemporary art criticism of the artwork in which writing is prominent testifies to this —so too current academic research: *as* writing, artists' texts are rarely examined.[41] Unable to situate them or unsure of how to read them, this lack of criticism specific to their writerly aspect is significant for both the artists' writings' unresolved functioning, and for institutional processes (still) striving for, without being quite capable of dealing with, the *questions* of categorization, or *un*categorization.[42] My research seeks to offer an initial response to this aporia. Suggesting empirical research that participates in a broader theoretical arena, I attempt to re-evaluate my own position as a critic and teacher at an art school in the Netherlands, tangled up with what I perceive and feel to be an institutional impasse in this context.

The recent surge in artists' writings, often paradoxically resisting their commissioning institutions be it in form or content, correlates with recent political-economical transformations and educational reforms. For instance, the major funding cuts and resultant reorganization of institutions in my context of the Netherlands. While seemingly unrelated, these institutional reorganizations help contextualize my thesis that it is this debilitating political-economic tide that is pushing artists into ceaseless production and presentation as cultural entrepreneurs. Higher fine art education in Europe has been preoccupied by the consequences of the Bologna process. [43] This process's decision to implement an academic structure at art academies means that they are accredited to deliver bachelor, master, and PhD degrees, leading to (or the fear is) the unification of an educational system so it might contribute more "efficiently" to a European knowledge economy. Attuned to a neoliberal vision, the emphasis on

cognitive capital necessarily raised the question of the artists' work vis-à-vis this systematic educational change. Art education's application of a uniform and unified system, based on output to be quantified, awoke the fear of standards turning into standardization. It prompted questions of conformity impinging upon artistic research and research's relation to an economy-driven culture industry equipped for unremitting production and presentation. The autonomy of artistic research was feared jeopardized by educational reforms, obliterating spaces for process-based reflective research. What is interesting in relation to my study is that an important part of the discussion pivoted around the question of the place writing was to occupy amid these educational changes. Once artists were allowed to pursue PhDs, the question became whether they had to dedicate (part of) their doctorate to a written supplement to meet academic standards. And if so, what form should this written part take? [44]

These heated debates around what were felt to be academic contrivances can be viewed in terms of a more corporate attitude toward a market economy that has attained recognition not only on a European scale but a global one as well. With neo-capitalistic attitudes permeating art, its market, and its institutions, artists not only live, they manage their careers, often experiencing difficulties doing both. Neoliberalism marking a continuing trend toward individualism gives the contemporary artist a face. She is required to be available 24/7, incessantly adjusting to a knowledge economy difficult to avoid. A reflective working process following its own method and pace, including its possibility to hesitate and fail, hardly complies with the current economy. Several authors have justly pointed out the problems and pitfalls of its strategies in relation to art.[45] What is important for my investigation is the position artists' writings take in this debate. Or as I would rather have it: the possibilities they create within this turmoil of radical institutional shifts.

It is clear that artists continue to write,[46] in spite of, or thanks to neoliberal times. Although institutional positions have been, and still are in the process of being rephrased, sustained protests against political-economic accoutrements seem antithetical to an actual art practice. With art understood as intimately linked to market-driven configurations and an educational system only seemingly operating at the periphery of economic motivations, artists' writings have often been comprehended as concrete accounts of otherwise vague practices - as extensions of the puzzling and opaque.[47] [48] The artists' text would legitimize an art project, reflecting on the artist's own oeuvre or art in general.

Reading contemporary artists' texts, such views seem limited as they disregard language's malleability clear in the artists' writings procedures

and textual strategies, such as lapses between narrative layers, overt applications of metatextual comments, and organizations of the text employed as material. Traditional divisions are frequently maintained between image and text, criticism and creation. Reading Cytter, Moti, McCarthy, García, Magid, Strau, Day, Barnas, Camille de Toledo, Buckingham, and many others, I see that traditional categorical divisions are mined, questioned and altered, tested, trespassed, transformed, and transgressed. From a historical point of view, reigning perspectives on artists' texts seem to forget the various forms of writing experimented with already, especially since the 1960s and 1970s, as was pointed out before. Although the relation of contemporary artists' writing to "its" past and Conceptual Art specifically has to be studied more closely, something subsequent pages seek to do, alternative relations are being forged both within art practices and between their many and diverse constituent parts.

Cytter, García, Strau, and Buckingham

The first chapter commences with the question of how narrative is constructed in the artists' text. It takes Cytter's *The Seven Most Exciting Hours* as its starting point. The textual strategies immanent in this work are read with postmodern literature and its critique, tracing the artists' writing's procedures. Central to this comparative analysis is the notion of referentiality. Referentiality is the key problem of postmodern theory, and not fully addressed.[49] The artists' text seems to expand precisely on referentiality. Thinking through referentiality within the artists' text vis-à-vis intertextuality, I take into account Lyotard's understanding that tries to add nuance to the relationship between the textual structure and visuality; it thus opposes a post-structuralist comprehension of referentiality that has breached an all too intimate connection between word and world.

As the cover serves as entry point to the artists' text, three main questions could be attached to an analysis of what appears a textual threshold or *Seuil*.[50] The cover evokes questions about imagination's operative force in relation to referentiality; it instigates quests into the functioning of the image vis-à-vis referentiality, and asks after the position the reader occupies, which in this case focuses on Cytter's work. Separated into three subsections, the first chapter examines the notion of referentiality against the background of the narrative construction of the artists' text. Departing from a Barthesean understanding of narrativity as "the confusion of consecution and consequence, what comes *after* being read in narrative as what is *caused by*," the role of the fantastical transpiring in the artists' text, and the textual handling of the "theme" is investigated:

how is the fantastical textually embedded,[51] compared to a postmodern problematizing of textuality? [52] Image-text relationships are researched, aligning them with narrative relations, and postmodern valuing of the image as textual fringe.[53] This positioning simultaneously relies on textual closed circuits and language as a code.[54] The chapter closes with a look into how the relationship between reception and production are elaborated in Cytter's work given postmodern promulgations that only language happens in the text, and that the author is dead while the reader survives.[55]

Starting from García's work *The Inadequate* (2011), the second chapter takes as its core study the form *of* the artists' text, *in* the artists' text, as it is discussed by the artists' text. A paradoxical position is thus created, since the question arises as to how such a formal self-exploration can be realized *at the same time* as reflecting on it. This paradoxical situation is known as metafiction. Juxtaposing *The Inadequate* with metafiction, three aspects construing the artists' text—story, insight, and conviction—are recast in two strands that compose metafiction. The latter is "intent to mask dead conventions." Alongside this, metafiction thinks through the relationship between practice and reflection or theory ("the distinction between literary and critical texts begins to fade").[56] The artists' writing's highly designed form, a predilection shared with metafiction,[57] manifests itself in its fragmentary character.

Given that textual fragmentation and textual self-reflection are not unrelated,[58] I wondered how this interrelationship reveals itself in artists' writing. *The Inadequate* is studied in analogy to various forms in which the fragment appears,[59] investigating whether its characteristics can be comprehended as metafictional detours.[60] Concentrating on its textual manufacturing, I research to what degree the fragmentary participates in an agency of the artists' text.[61]

The second chapter prioritizes the fragment and the fragmentary, thereby implicitly questioning the role and function of the author. The frequent and recurrent use of the "I" in artists' writings in general makes the issue an urgent one. The third chapter taps into the debate addressing the second translation of the Jena Romantic journal *Athenaeum*'s notion of auto-formation, discussed in the second chapter in relation to the fragment. It pivots around processes of subjectification and individuation, of the constitution of an "I" or a self, of the relation between these, and between the subject and the other or its Other. Strau's *A Dissidence Coincidence but W.H.C.T.L.J.S.* (2008) is taken as a starting point to investigate the theme, setting the artists' text against autobiography/autofiction.

A typology is construed to enable the research. The artists' text-as-autobiographical is suggested to be: 1) a narrative unfolding from the now of the exhibition (and the construction thereof) to the past and the future, thus including several times, or comprehending time as multilayered; 2) a retrospective account, constructive and communicative report simultaneously, linking the psychical subject of the work to the social individual relating "it" to the group; 3) an ongoing process; and 4) transdisciplinary. Delving into the autobiography/autofiction debate, the position of psychoanalysis in the constitution of the "I" is further investigated. This also works toward getting a firmer grip on the mechanisms immanent in the conception of writing in the artists' text.

Key to the fourth chapter is the functioning of the single word in the artists' text. This choice of focus is underpinned by my interest in "concretism" in artists' writing, that is, the sense of rendering language concrete.[62] I am interested in how something within the text, such as the word, could offer a counterbalance to the post-structuralist predilection to focus on syntactical construction.[63] Although artists' writings might resist categorization, the discourse around them often turns to the question of a vocabulary peculiar to *the* artists' text.[64] Buckingham's "Muhheakantuck – Everything Has a Name" (2005, 2007, 2008) is examined here for possible blueprints on which to map out a more specific vocabulary, chosen especially for its form as trilogy immediately pushing the idea of categorization to the fore.

Contemporary poetry and artists' writings having shared concerns in both having to face an increasingly mediatized world leading to a growing presence of the word, begs for analysis against poetry.[65] In the first section of this chapter I discuss the crisis between poetry and 1960s and 1970s Conceptual Art that seems to underlie artists' texts today.[66] I attempt to position artists' writing, Buckingham's in particular, in relation to conceptual writing and the distribution of the text. Following this, the archival work immanent in artists' writing is explored specifically with respect to these questions:[67] how does the textual construction of the artists' text elicit a certain reading of it? What can a comprehension of the artists' text learn from poetry's textual strategies, and of conceptual writing specifically? Following this, I return to the question of the functioning of the image in the artists' text,[68] trying to localize it while starting to suggest approaches to "Muhheakantuck's" formal variations. While the chapter ends on a speculative note, reading the artists' writing with the work of the French poet Francis Ponge, I conclude with what I perceive as the distinctive features of the artists' text.