

1 : 100 – and back again

I am an Artistic Research Fellow at Oslo National Academy of the arts, the Academy of Theatre. I am a playwright, author and dramaturge, and my research is in the field of performative text.

My background is as an author. I had my first novel published in 1992, and my first play commissioned and staged in 1999.

Since then I have strived to understand the performative aspects of text production. Written traditional plays and worked across the field. I have worked with dramatic installations, radio plays, and texts for the web. Written librettos and done a series of interdisciplinary work.

Since 2012 I've worked as a dramaturge at Hålogaland Teater, and curated a series of twenty one laboratories for the performing arts under the heading ArtLab.

My method for working is exploratory. I switch between writing solo, doing workshop with actors, and more experimental and collaborative work.

A fascination for the voice and its affective expressiveness is often at the core of my work. I'm interested in multi focus, parallel stories and imperative addresses.

In my fellowship I plan to produce texts that resemble traditional dramatic texts, voice-collages and dramatic installation work. As I see it, these processes will go hand in hand with more reflective activities.

An ethical tension

My starting point is deeply personal.

Lately I have been feeling that I live in this constant state of ethical tension. My feeling of being a person with a free will and free choices, is constantly rubbing shoulders with these other feeling, a feeling of being in the middle of history.

On one side it is me and my personal struggles. On the other hand I'm faced with situations that stem from deep political and economical dilemmas.

My main enquiry is – How can I as a playwright express this tensions in my work?

What challenges would this entail? In what way can my texts expose the trans-

individual superstructures that influences our lives without losing sight of their existential dilemmas they evoke?

An aesthetic tension

*Ethics and aesthetics are one.*¹ - said Wittgenstein.

An aesthetic praxis is also an ethical praxis. In what I write and the way I write I expose not only my preferences when it comes to artistic expression, but also my world view. When I write I feed off the personal – but as it is a play, a text meant to be performed in a public space by an artistic collective, my writing immediately enters into a dialogue with the public sphere.

Again, that creates a tension.

Between the ethical and my aesthetics.

Between my private needs and desires, and their place in the public.

Between the text and the «world».

My project has as its main aim to solve, or manifest, this tension in my work. To explore ways to write texts that has as its core the relationship between the public, the private, the political and the existential.

My question is: How can I write texts for the stage that can articulate or show structures that are intrinsic in our society, and at the same time not lose sight of the individual and existential dilemmas that follows.

How narrate a «We»?

I've called this presentation «From one to a hundred and back again». Why?

Since this seminar started, I've been looking at my title. Suddenly the words rung false. They felt problematic.

Let's first look at the formulation - *1:100*.

When you read this, it is very easy to interpret my project as an ongoing and continual expanding movement from one individual to the many. To think that I, as a principle, are going to leave the one, the individual and singular - and let her be engulfed in a never ending plural. But off course, all texts and all projects come from a source, and go through that source. There is no escaping it. I, «the one» – can never become «the many». That's why it's necessary to point out that to even try this would be futile, and that during this research period I will be going back and forth in a constant flux. Trying to reach out, and having to return back to myself. That in the performative texts, and the reflections, there will be a constant pulsating exchange between the writer, the writing and their plurality of the voices and the world views I will strive to accommodate in my texts.

What about the word narrate?

The word narrate usually gives associations to tell, as in to tell a story. That again gives itself to a understanding of the word narrate as a stand in for the word narration, story-telling, a narrative following a plot based structures. So maybe using this word is misleading. I do not yet know weather my works will narrate in this way. Maybe I would be happier if I could leave out that word all together, but what word can replace it? It seems that to narrate is the only term we can reach for whent it comes to pointing to the activity of composing textual structures – even the ones that are more like text-landscapes, poetical constructions, etydes, quartets or voice-collages.

The third obstacle is the word «we».

I find the term problematic mainly because of its defining, and normative connotations. Who is saying what is the «we». And what criteria defines this «we»? What's on the inside of it, and what's on the outside?

Words like «we» are frequently used in the media. As words like «us» and «the others». They are a part of the public discourse.

When my task is to explore ways to write texts that has as its core the relationship between the public, the private, the political and the existential – I have to look closely at the meaning of those words. «Us» and «them». «Public» and «private». «Political» and “existential”? And «we».

In what context do I use them?

How do I place myself within them?

How does my texts «deal» with them?

And what does all that say about how I perceive the world.

When I state «the many» – or «the hundreds», that has to be understood as something, or someone that is not me. A «them», or «those» – ore something more than me. But how can I separate myself from the other, when that entity is in my text and I am the one that has put it there. And how can I possible understand myself as something completely separate from the multitude? If that was so – that I as an individual had no part in the «us», that there was nothing I belonged to, no «we» that engulfed me, no society that had shaped my thoughts and my way of being in the world, I would also have separated myself from the dilemmas I am trying to handle.

Hanna Arendt saysⁱⁱ - *The fictional story reveals a maker just as every work of art clearly indicates that it was made by somebody; this does not belong to the character of the story itself but only to the mode in which it came into existence.*

What interests me

I'm interested in Investigating types of performative texts for the stage. In other words: i am interested in my writings. They are my laboratory. My «what if». But to understand what they are, I have to understand my field.

So if my field is the production of all types of performative texts; texts for the stage, audio plays, music theatre, dramatic installations, voice-collages etc. What do they have in common?

All of these texts entails words that are to pass through a voice, and – if the stage is the medium – also a body. It is written words that are ment for being performed. Performed for an audience.

When I write for the stage, I do not write prose or poetry. A text for the stage looks different and its composition is based on different principles. The genre in itself is dirty. It involves combining different text types like dialogues, stage directions, monologues, situations, outbreaks, confessions, the one addressing the other. Each

type of text gives a signal to the ones that are going to perform it, and as a writer, I am the one putting these types of texts together.

My texts are full of different pointers.

They point to the use of time, to different topics, to the genre, or genres it gives itself to.

It is a construction. A composition. And these Breck-a-brack assemblages are as intrinsically rhetoric as they by nature are artefacts.

When I say they are artefacts, I mean that they are fictional. That they are made up. They are not true or real.

When I call my texts dirty, I mean that my texts are conglomerates understood in a geological way. They are montages where different types of texts are put together to communicate something very specific. They offer these different layers and text-types to tell a skilled reader how to deal with it performatively – directly or indirectly. They offer themselves to a praxis.

The performative text and its behaviour

I know that my texts are a part of me. That whatever I do, they *will* reflect who I am – and the time I live in. The life experiences I've had, and the way I foresee the future.

Still, they are something of their own.

The last years I have come to a new understanding of my performative texts. I have started to see them as entities in themselves. As intact and unique systems that consist of events, text surfaces, intertextuality etc. - and that all these separate parts interconnect.

These interconnected systems – has a «behavior», and it's the way the different parts are put together that gives it this behaviour. This is something the texts *is*, and at the same time it is something it **does**. It has *its* own way of behaving.

Due to that, the text itself entails an imperative that is not necessarily mine. It wants something. It demands something. Not only in the way it may ask to be performed or interpreted – but in the way it wants to be understood. This is the praxis.

This praxis also endorses a world view and an aesthetic. And this aesthetic, and the world view it represents – is *there* – inscribed in its structure as something self-explanatory and given. This, that is given, does also entail an ethical stance, and it's the way that I structure my texts, the way I compose them – or put them together, that gives each text its specific behaviour.

Working along these lines, when I start to explore how to write texts for the stage in a way that can articulate or show structures that are intrinsic in our society and at the same time do not lose sight of the individual and existential dilemmas that follow, – how will I go about it?

My main format and tool will be the sketch. That is text-sketches. Text-sketches that will be tried and tested in readings and workshops.

When I have enough sketches, I will start working with recording them. In these recordings – the quality and the expressiveness of the voice will be at the forefront. The tone and timbre, the musical quality. To get to that will be just as important as the interpretation of the content and the performance of the intentions of the text by the actor.

If things go according to plan – these recordings will be used in voice-montages and serve as starting point for the work on a more cohesive and story based radio play.

I will experiment in the studio, and some of the material will be the base for dramatic installations and work for the web.

I plan to follow the logic of the material as it is, not to map out finished and thought through scenarios. Accordingly, I assume the work will follow an accumulative pattern where the sketches I produce, and their manifestations, will inform and inspire new sketches and new manifestations that will function as building blocks for new stages of the research.

I hope that this additive method will both trigger new work and challenge my perspectives. That this process of trial and error can contribute both with new material and offer fresh starting points.

I am not planning to build a cohesive body of work – more a collection of series and offspring's that in a rhizomatic form belong to the same topical and contextual biotope.

I want my reflections not only to be done outside the artistic praxis – or in hindsight,

but to be at base for my explorations. A sketch can start with a reflection and another can lead to one. I want the reflections to challenge my artistic research. As I've already stated; I think of my texts as laboratories – as a «what if»? As models, maybe – in the way a mathematician would use one. It is a way of «thinking» or trying out an idea or a dilemma – giving it a form. A form for *now*. And this form for *now* is in itself an experiment AND an insight.

I also want the texts that moves from being a sketch to a more permanent type of text - to encompass some of the same qualities.

Maybe one can call this an accumulative method of trial and error. Not as a gradual gathering – but more like trying out different praxises – writing and testing. Re-writing and re-testing in different formats and forms. The previous experience built into the next where that feels relevant and necessary.

I will write solo – I will take the texts into group-situations where the work we do on the floor will influence my re-writing, and I hope in some degree to work with technics one can call collective writing in more communal and collaborative work as I have mentioned in my abstract.

My voice – or the voice of the many?

At the chore of my method is first and foremost an awareness of a certain attitude. A guideline pushing myself from texts that dwell on the singular on to the plural. Pushing the voices of the many – through the writer, through me.

How will I work?

Here is four possible examples with different focus points:

Focus-point 1: Addresses - the one addressing the other

For instance. I will start in the singular, writing monologues that are then shared among many performers in a workshop situation. I will look at how a subjective dramatic texts for one handles being split up and shared by many. Which part of the text dwells in the singular? What parts can be shared?

Through this process I will look at what happens with the text and its content and not to forget, what happens with it formally and aesthetically.

Focus-point 2: narration – The text as a narrator

I will look not only at the narrator as a character, or something narrated by a character, but also what the text itself narrates. I will strive to bring the narration - that often lies as a hidden premise, residing in the structure, to the surface. In the process – I will again look at the consequences of such an operation. What happens to the text? Its content? Formally and aesthetically.

I am particularly interested in over-individual narrators. And this is interconnected with a third focus point: The texts different topoi.ⁱⁱⁱ

Focus-point 4: The topoi – where am I/we speaking from?

I will try to choose places that produce the ethical tension I am looking for. Settings that forces private dilemmas to collide with public ones. It could be children living in a burnt out oil-tanker, it could be a small place on Americas east cost after a snow storm, it could be a sweat shop in Turkey that employes Syrian girls to produce flawed life-vests.

I will also look for rethorical topoi. Places the characters, or the differnt layers of text speak from. A lexical place. An emotional place? From a place after death where one knows it all.

Focus-point 4: material gathering and collective writing-processes

I will arrange workshops that explore methods for collective writing-processes. These workshops will also function as possibilitets for gathering material through different log in techniques and audience based work. Through these processes I will also try to challenge my habits and safe sones as a writer.

I will try and establish a rhythm between the different focus-points and praxises during the three year periode.

Towards the beginning of the third year I will try to combine these tools and trials and seek to find a system for categorizing the different sketches, the documentation and the reflective comments and articles that has been developed along with them

I will try to document the trial-manifestations through pictures, recordings and video.

I will try to keep a catalogue, digitally – where all the material will be gathered and systematized.

I will also try to write 3-4 complementary essays.

From 1 : 100 and back again

So what will be the end point?

There are goals like accumulating knowledge, understanding, insight, comprehension and experience. Off course I want all of this, but for me my research period is also about challenging myself and my understanding of what art is, what good art is, and who I am as an artist. Can I write differently? Not necessarily better, but in another way, and in this a way open up a new path in the field of playwriting, maybe also for others? A path less Eurocentric, less concerned with the needs of the individual, more concerned about the real drama. That which does not only shape eachs soul, but shape the world we live in and how we perceive it.

I think that this will be quite a challenge. Also to my vanity.

I think I will need to go from 1 to a 100 and back again over and over again. For what does WE really mean? How can I stand in the fiery hard of my «I» and know that I am not alone?

Looking at my title opened questions - word by word.

I want to keep on asking questions like that.

I want to ask: Who is speaking?

I want to ask: Why am I speaking?

I want to ask: Who am I speaking to?

ⁱ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/324147-ethics-and-aesthetics-are-one>

ⁱⁱ *The fictional story reveals a maker just as every work of art clearly indicates that it was made by somebody; this does not belong to the character of the story itself but only to the mode in which it came into existence.* Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press. January 1, 1958.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Topos, i retorikk en etablert oppfatning eller et konvensjonelt argument. Topos (flertall: topoi) er særlig knyttet til arbeidsfasen inventio, der formålet er å finne momenter som kan hjelpe retoren til å overbevise. I det tematiske landskapet er topoi steder der momentene og argumentene lett finnes, fordi de vanligvis settes i forbindelse med det oppgitte temaet. <https://snl.no/topos>*