

Genre pictures and experiments in writing

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Abstract

Genre pictures and experiments in writing is a study in article form of the interaction between image, word and sound. It consists of five essays, which have been published or otherwise made accessible to the public in various forums for artistic research, plus a total of seven videoworks. The last of these videos is a wordless epilogue. The thesis also includes an introduction in the form of a letter.

The subject matter of my research derives from the miraculous experience in which sound brings an image to life, and so the questions I ask are very practical ones: “What would happen if I put the clink of a spoon here? And what if I bring it forwards a few seconds?” But my treatment of the topic is not limited solely to the artworks, since, as the work has progressed, I have realized that writing, too, involves an investigation of image, word and sound or (my own) voice. The text component of my thesis can further be linked to the tradition of experimental research writing. When making each of the essays, I have thought: “Can one write like this? Is this acceptable in the research community?”

My texts are also experiments in the sense that in them I explore various genres of writing. In the first essay, “Tango Lesson – Study on the encounter of empirical science and art”, the research focusses on scientific texts, even if the result is actually close to being conceptual art, playing with science. In the second essay (“What does silence sound like?”) I practise drama writing, in the third (“Delicate wash 40 degrees”) I keep a diary, and in the fourth (“A videowork as a genre picture”) I review literary means with the help of the writer Riina Katajavuori. The fifth text (“An archive of consolation”) is the most radical of my experiments, since in it I imagine an essay as being a house with different rooms, and ask: Could a research text be constructed in the same way as a picture? This question is linked with a broader consideration of how to write as a visual artist, and can be seen as being one of the results of my research.

Another result is the videowork *Voices of Consolation* (2014), consisting of interiors by the Dane Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864–1916). To be sure, the other works are end results, too – not data or source material – but I see them as kinds of interim statements of account, while *Voices of Consolation* is the sum total of all my research, a genre painter’s equivalent of the journeyman’s demonstration work. As a by-product of my studies I have, in fact, realized that, even though I make videoworks, at heart I am a painter, and my works are kinds of contemporary genre pictures, i.e. tableau-like scenes from everyday life.

The methods used in my research reflect the way I make art: I set up the camera in the corner of my home laboratory and watch what happens. If I don’t have time for anything else, I keep a diary or write letters. Another thing that has become a key method has been ‘inviting guests’, i.e. asking for the help of other artists or researchers. In addition to the writer Riina Katajavuori, the guests in my study include the sound designer Tatu Virtamo and the graphic designer Jorma Hinkka, plus the members of the Nordic Summer University’s artistic-research study circle. Thanks to them my work has not been a lone slog, but a form of collective play; “lab work”, in the sense that the term is used in performing-arts circles.

The publication platform for my thesis, Research Catalogue, is an international database of artistic research, which makes it possible to publish essays and videoworks together.