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Towards a shared understanding: A study of the intersubjective management of critique between an artist and a critic

This article scrutinizes the trajectory of an evaluation of the visual appearance of an artistic installation, during a conversation between a visual artist and a critic. The study analyzes how the artist receives and responds to the critic's evaluations of the artwork in three different phases of evaluative discourse: an initial, an elaborating, and a concluding one. The artist's responses change from minimal responses and hypothetical solutions, via repeating utterances, to overt agreements and outspoken explanations. The development of the artist's response to the critic's evaluations reflects an increase in the participants' shared intersubjective understanding and in the artist's strengthened epistemic position: the critique can be accepted only after the artist has gone through interactional phases that lead up to an appreciation of the critique that thus can be commented on and partly transformed.

Keywords: evaluation, intersubjectivity, epistemics, agency, multimodal interaction

Asiasanat: arviointi, intersubjektiivisuus, episteemisyyt, toimijuus, multimodaalinen vuorovaikutus

1 Introduction

Meaning making and evaluation of art are central themes in the social universe in which artists and artworks operate, and as such, are studied in the field of sociology of art. This means that art and its social value do not exist in a vacuum and are not by any means the product of an isolated artist. Art thus comments on, draws material from, and reflects the society in which it operates. However, its status as ‘art’ is sociologically seen as a result of all the different actors’ practices that are involved in its shaping and constituting processes: the artist who produces the art, the art educations that foster artists, the critics who comment on and review the art, the journals, newspapers, TV and radio channels that publish the reviews, the galleries and museums that exhibit art, and the people and foundations who buy and sell it (Zolberg 1990; Heikkilä 2012; Tanner 2010; Danto 1964).

These macro-social processes affect the micro contexts of social action, in which discourses are created and recreated (Erickson 2011). More precisely, what occurs at the discourse level of certain contexts provides information about existing norms and about power relations in a specific organization or profession (Sarangi & Roberts 1999; Adelswärd 1995). The field of art is no exception (see, for example, Bourdieu 2000, 1984, 1997 for descriptions of the institutional character of the art field). The conceptualizing and evaluative “talk” about art, which in a broad sense can be described as criticism (Heikkilä 2012: 12), largely takes place in various media, such as newspapers, art journals and magazines, TV and radio channels, blogs, web sites, and social media. Research about art discourse often focuses on these mediated conversations, along with other complementary documentation (Orrghen 2007; Heikkilä 2012).

These mediated conversations, which I include here in a broad understanding of the concept called criticism (see Heikkilä 2012), are mostly public and therefore easily accessible. This is the case with most types of criticism, be they either normative comments on and discussions about what art should be, reviews of already published/exhibited works (often published in the press after new releases and openings), or questionings of older works and how they were received and evaluated (Zaine 1988: 31–32). However, one type of criticism, which is harder to obtain and therefore less researched, is *studio critique*,¹ which is more directly linked to the artworks’ production and the artists’ working processes. It can take place, for example, in academic contexts where professors or critics assess artists’ work (see, for example, Lindwall et al. 2008 for a study on critique sessions within architect educations)

1 My own translation of the Swedish *ateljékritik* in Zaine (1988: 31–32) and the Finnish *ateljėekritiikki* in Heikkilä (2012: 45).

or when critics, curators, or buyers visit artists' studios and discuss their art (see Thornton 2008: 183–217 for an example of a studio visit).

This study will focus on one form of studio critique that takes place between visual artists and critics while discussing the artist's work, face to face. I here draw on my own videotaped artist-critic conversations that were collected in exhibition and gallery spaces in Helsinki between 2017 and 2019. As the exhibitions are already hung and ongoing, the conversations in my data cannot in a strict sense (as described by Zaine 1988: 31–32) be seen as studio critique. Nonetheless, as the discussion between the critic and the artist will not lead to a review or a text for a specific newspaper, book, or magazine, it is not strictly a review type of criticism either. The review type of criticism is often conducted without the need for a discussion with the artist. Furthermore, in any form of studio critique, the artists would need to provide some examples of their work to enable a conversation about them. The artist-critic conversations in my data are in this sense comparable with critique sessions where portfolios are assessed, for example.

Within the research on professional discourse, workplace studies, and institutional talk (see, for example, Sarangi & Roberts 1999; Gunnarsson et al. 1997; Drew & Heritage 1992) these kinds of *backstage activities* (a concept originating from Goffman 1959 and applied by, for example, Sarangi & Roberts 1999: 19–24) are valuable research material. That is because they reveal parts of the undocumented professional practice that goes on behind the public eye, showing how members of a profession relate to each other and their professional knowledge, as well as how they jointly co-produce meaning and collaboratively constitute and negotiate the topic of the discussion, in this case concerning visual art. This view of the creation of meaning and social value as something jointly produced and interdependent with another interlocutor rhymes well with interactional and dialogistic theories about human sense making. Following Linell (1998, 2009), the construction of meaning is only possible in interaction with another (also including texts and artefacts), who can fulfil a complementary role in the interaction. Communication, including criticism, must therefore be viewed as an interactional *achievement*.

Studio critique has the potential to be fruitful for both the critic and the artist. It can lead to a transformation of both of their processes in some direction by offering valuable food for thought from another professional within the art field (Carroll 2009: 24; Heikkilä 2012: 53) – someone with a complementary role with another professional perspective and knowledge in relation to the artwork. However, these two professional roles are asymmetrical. The critic, be it a reviewer, writer, gallerist, museum director, art historian, or something of that kind, is in a gatekeeping role towards the artist. By, for example, writing a review or giving a recommendation, the critic has the authority and power to, as Erickson

(2011: 433) puts it, “affect the social mobility and life chances” of the artist who is being assessed.

In my data, no acute judgement is at stake, in the form of an upcoming review, for example. Nevertheless, the critic still has the symbolic power to direct the conversation by choosing what is verbalized, discussed, and evaluated. This tension can affect the talk-in-interaction and, more specifically, how the artist receives and responds to the critic’s evaluations of the artwork. How the participants deal with this role-based tension is the focus of this study and it will be analyzed using a dialogistic interactional approach, which can contribute with methodological knowledge on how professionals with different, asymmetrical, but at the same time complementary roles collaboratively negotiate evaluations of objects of art.

2 Evaluating art in face-to-face interaction

In much of today’s culture journalism, where art exhibitions are also reviewed, the take on criticism is more in the nature of neutral descriptive explanatory criticism. However, in a stricter understanding of the concept of criticism, *evaluation* is the operation that singles out criticism from other forms of texts about art (Heikkilä 2012: 29). The criteria for what should be evaluated, and how, still vary from critic to critic. The leading critical movement of the twentieth-century modernist tradition has been the formalist approach, which poses the question whether the achievement of the artist – the form the artwork inhabits – is appropriate to the artist’s intention or not. This approach grew especially strong in the 1950s and 60s, when the notion of *contemporary art* emerged in the Western world. However, other ways of relating to criticism still co-exist with this tradition – for example, the principles of pleasure and societal relevance – and these are often combined with each other. (Heikkilä 2012; Hautamäki 2012: 209–211.)

Whatever form of criticism one is educated in and adopts, there seems to be agreement on the fact that one needs to explain and ground one’s evaluations (see Heikkilä 2012; Carroll 2009). Furthermore, by taking an evaluative stance towards something, we are not only providing a categorization or an assessment about the evaluated object but also about our actions and ourselves, which potentially is a very serious and delicate matter, involving our social face (Linde 1997: 166–169; Goffman 1967: 5–45).

Epistemics, agency, and intersubjective understanding

In spoken face-to-face interaction, both participants are dependent on each other for evaluation. The critic must conceptualize his views and assessments about the artistic achievements in situ. The artist, on the other hand, must attend and relate to the critic's interpretations and can in addition offer valuable knowledge on the works' processes and intentions. Here some shared understanding – *intersubjectivity* – must be assumed at some level, otherwise it would seem rather pointless to engage in communication at all. However, besides mutuality and sharedness of perspectives the concept of intersubjectivity can also contain different views, knowledge, and perspectives in interaction (Schutz 1953; Linell 2009: 81–82).

The artist has first-hand knowledge of the artistic process and intentions, alongside the material and compositional possibilities, while the critic is assumed to see the prepared installation in the light of artistic genres, styles, and categories, and perhaps refer to transparency towards a potential viewer. In other words, the artist has direct *epistemic access* to her art-making, while the critic has *epistemic primacy* (or authority), thanks to his institutional position when assessing art (see Stivers et al. 2011).

In positioning themselves through evaluations, the participants also claim a higher or lower degree of *agency*. For example, the person who makes a first assessment exerts higher agency relative to the responding speakers, who have less of a chance to say something independently of the first speaker (see Enfield 2011). Agency constellations, then, also play a role in artist-critic conversations and may change during the interaction.

3 Methodological approach and data

This study applies an interactional linguistic approach and accordingly uses the analytical concepts developed by the tradition of Conversation Analysis (CA) (see, for example, Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018; Stivers & Sidnell 2013). Conversation analysis and interactional linguistics can demonstrate, in a fine-grained way, how the talk-in-interaction unfolds sequentially and how the participants display their understandings of each other's utterances and visible conduct, especially how the artist receives and responds to the critic's evaluations.

To analyze this I have chosen to focus on the interactional and sequential organization of one *evaluative project* within one single conversation in Swedish between a visual artist with Swedish as a first language (L1), and a former museum director and critic, for whom Swedish is a second language (L2). I here draw on Linell's (1998: 207–234) concept of a *communicative project* that is a discourse-analytic concept that aims to make sense of a

certain matter of focus or “problem” within social interaction – in this case, the evaluation of an artistic installation. In the conversation chosen for this analysis, the participants interact closely with the artworks, move from one work to another in the exhibition space, and are actively oriented towards describing, categorizing, interpreting, and evaluating the works. In other words, this conversation consists of different evaluative projects. This study will focus on one of these.

In this project, the participants scrutinize and evaluate a specific artistic installation, which consists of several dolls that are installed in a similar manner, on speaker stands, and located in the same exhibition room together with three video works (see Image 1 and Image 2). In this evaluative project, the critic localizes a problem with the visual appearance of the artistic installation. This problem is then returned to a little later in the conversation, first by the critic, and then again by the artist, hereby making it an interesting case for analysis.



Image 1. Contextual setting, first angle

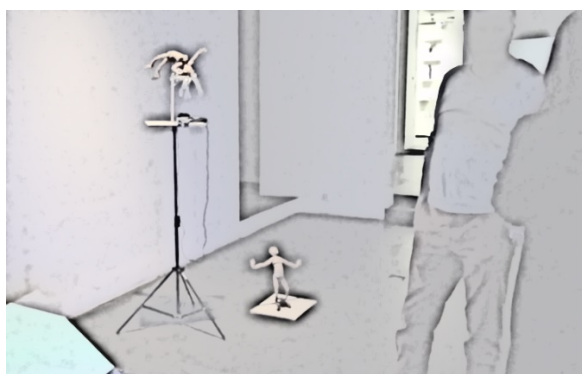


Image 2. Contextual setting, second angle

To demonstrate the progression and modification of the evaluative project I have localized three interactional phases within it: 1) an initiating first phase, 2) an elaborating second phase, and 3) a concluding third phase. In between these phases, the participants also discuss the other works that are present in the exhibition room. Yet, they return to the doll installations, and conclude the evaluative project concerning them, before they move to another room. The example sequences used for the analysis are excerpted from the three phases in which they occur.

The conversation in focus is part of my own videotaped recordings of so-called backstage conversations (see Sarangi & Roberts 1999: 19–24) between Swedish-speaking visual artists and critics, or other kinds of gatekeepers, such as a curator, gallerist, museum director, or reviewer. The conversations take place in Helsinki-based galleries where the artists have ongoing exhibitions at the time of the recording. The total data encompass approximately three hours of conversation.

I have asked the participants in their professional capacity, as artists and critics, to take part in these evaluating conversations about the artist's exhibited artworks. From a strict CA perspective, this can be questioned because they did not initiate the conversation themselves. However, the focus for this study is the format of the so-called studio critique session, which takes place specifically out of the public eye, and these conversations are hard to know about in advance.

Although criticism and evaluation can be treated firstly as something verbal (see Carroll 2009; and Heikkilä 2012), face-to-face interaction is always embodied (Mondada 2016; Goodwin 2013; Heath & Luff 2013). Therefore, this communicative project will be analyzed *multimodally*. I will pay attention to how the participants co-coordinate and sequentially organize both lexico-syntactic and non-verbal resources, such as gaze, hand gestures, and object orientation, to modify and develop their understanding of the artworks throughout the conversation. For this purpose, multimodal transcriptions with conventions based on Mondada's (2016) work will be applied.

Following these conventions, each participant has a symbol, which is inserted in the speech line at the exact time when an embodied action occurs. The multimodal transcription is rendered with a grey font and screen shots of an embodied conduct are included when it is relevant for the analysis. The verbal talk is transcribed by conventions developed within CA. The English translations are reproduced with a different font to the Swedish original, and the syntax follows the Swedish as far as it is comprehensible in the English representation. Transcription symbols for both verbal talk and embodied conduct are explained in the Appendix.

4 Doing an evaluation collaboratively

In the following sections (4.1–4.3), I will analyze the interactional organization of a critic's evaluation, exemplified by Extracts 1–5, of the compositional aspects of an artistic installation consisting of several sewed dolls standing on boards that are placed on speaker stands (see Images 1–2 for the contextual setting). The analysis of this evaluative project is carried out in three interactional phases: 1) an initiating first phase, 2) an elaborating second phase, and 3) a concluding third phase.

The different dolls all have their own title and can be seen and analyzed as individual works in their own right. Yet, in the discussion about the dolls (initiated and lead by the critic), they are compared with each other in relation to how well their *compositional unity*, as Carroll (2009: 27) puts it, – with doll, board, stand, and everything – is achieved. Nonetheless, the subject matter or “object” of the evaluation is not clear and self-evident from the beginning of the interactional trajectory. The critic must first localize, describe, and conceptualize what is under scrutiny (see 4.1). This so-called problem formulation, which is developed multimodally and incrementally, bit by bit, is first treated cautiously by the artist with minimal responses and with responses offering hypothetical solutions.

In the second phase (see 4.2), the achievement of the installation is analyzed further by the critic and acknowledged and slightly modified by the artist by repeating utterances, and finally, in the third phase (see 4.3), the evaluation is accepted and partly transformed by the artist. The analysis focuses mainly on the artist's responsive utterances in order to demonstrate how an intersubjective understanding of the evaluation is achieved and modified, as well as how agency constellations are transformed, by the participants as a progressive interactional achievement. To do this, I will first analyze how the evaluation is multimodally initiated and developed by the critic, that is, how the evaluation is made accessible to the artist.

4.1 Phase one: describing and conceptualizing a problem



During the first phase, which is initiated about 16 minutes into a conversation of 54 minutes, the critic multimodally locates, describes, and conceptualizes the “object” of the evaluation, that is, the composition of the doll installations. The artist responds to the evaluation expressed in this phase with minimal responses and with responses that present alternative hypothetical solutions. Through both measures, the artist signals that she treats the evaluation cautiously. The whole evaluating sequence in this phase goes on for about 2.5 minutes.

4.1.1 Problem formulations and minimal responses


In the following extract, the critic initiates an evaluation of the appearance of the supporting board that the dolls are standing on. This initiation of the evaluation comes after a short general discussion about the dolls and their reason for being in the exhibition. The artist has also mentioned two of the dolls' titles.

(1) so visually I have a bit of a problem**Art: Artist****Crit: Critic****+ = critic's embodied conduct; Ꝁ = artist's embodied conduct**

```

01 Crit:      +[tycker] du att +den där
              do you think that that one
              crit:      +.....rises left arm.....+points with left index finger
02 Art:      [ve:t ]
              knows
03 Crit:      +att visuellt #jag har lite #pro[blem]
              so visually I have a bit of a problem
              crit:      +--rises right arm #im.1.1-points#im.1.2-->
              
              im.1.1 im.1.2
04 Art:      Ꝁ[jå ]
              yeah
              art:      Ꝁ
              Ꝁlooks at artwork->
05 Crit:      med di- den+ här (.) Ꝁden här platta-+ #öh vad Ꝁ[heter] den nu
              with tho- this (.) this plat- #öh what's it called now
              crit:      +-----+--finger circles in air-+points--#im.1.3-waves with fingers->
              art:      Ꝁ-----Ꝁlooks at critic----->Ꝁlooks at artwork->
              
              im.1.3
06 Art:      [ok↑ej]
              okay
07 Crit:      de- den här öh (.) skivan som är under den=
              th- this öh (.) board that is under it=
              crit:      +---while pointing----->
              art:      Ꝁ-----looking at artwork----->Ꝁ
08 Art:      Ꝁ=↑jå=
              =yeah=
              crit:      +----->
              art:      Ꝁlooks at critic->
09 Crit:      +=och de+n där visu- visuellt liksom (1.0) helheten=
              =and that visu- visual like (1.0) whole=
              crit:      +..... +--flat hand fingers wave----->
              art:      Ꝁ-----looking at critic----->
10 Art:      =ok↑ej (0.5) [jå:]
              =okay (0.5) yeah
              crit:      +----->
              art:      Ꝁ----->
11 Crit:      [att] den blir lite (0.5) den den liksom #stö-
              so it becomes a bit (0.5) it it like does not supp-
              crit:      +-----, , , #im.1.4((cups hands))

```



```

crit:
art:
12 Crit:
crit:
13 Art:
art:
14 Crit:
crit:
art:

```

im.1.4 im.1.5

⌘-----looking at critic----->

stödar in#te så mycket +di här do- dock+or +[den e] bara
support so much these do- dolls it is just

crit: +-----#im.1.5 up&down-+,,,,,,+clasps. hands+.....->

⌘[.hh]

art: ⌘-----looking at critic-----⌘looks at art work->

liksom som (.) +platta under+
like like (.) plate under

crit: +-.....+draws square in air-->+

art: ⌘----->>⌘

In Extract 1, the critic initiates what will be the beginning of a longer trajectory of an evaluative project that will be revisited and readdressed a little later in the conversation (see sections 4.2 and 4.3). The critic begins the sequence below with a question format in line 1: *tycker du att den där* ('do you think that that one'), which he then changes into a statement in line 3 starting with the Swedish subordinate conjunction *att*, which is here used as a discourse particle (transl. into 'so' in Eng.) that links content anaphorically.²

This statement *att visuellt jag har lite problem* ('so visually I have a bit of a problem') in line 3 projects an evaluation of something as problematic. The statement format with the active *jag* ('I') also projects a closer description of what the problem is about and demonstrates a stance of somebody who has epistemic primacy (and perhaps an obligation) to have a view and make an assessment of the artworks discussed (cf. Stivers et al. 2011). At the same time, by using the personal pronoun, and the modifier *lite* ('a little'), the critic also mitigates the problem formulation, saying that it is he (not necessarily other critics), who has some problem with the artist's solution.

After (and while) the problem is verbally projected in line 3, it is further localized both verbally and with deictic pointing gestures (see lines 5–7), which first co-occurred with the deictic expression *den där* ('that one') in line 1, but then again in line 3 at *problem* ('problem'); see Image 1.2. These gestures are also a means to project and localize the problem (Mondada 2016: 7), which is first located at and verbalized as the word *platta* ('plate') (line 5), but then changed to the more suitable word *skiva* ('board') (line 7) after a word search item *vad heter den nu* ('what's it called now') in line 5. This stalling of the verbal production could also be a means for the critic to let the artist react to the critique.

In Extract 1, the critic does not only localize the problem, but also conceptualizes it as "the visual whole" and states that this does not support the dolls (see lines 9 and 11–14). This co-occurs with conceptualizing and depicting gestures (Streeck 2009: 151–177), which

² For an elaboration on this use of *att*, see, for example, Lehti-Eklund (2001) and Lindström & Londen (2003).

seem to bring coherence to the fragmented speech. With this conceptualization the critic touches on the installation's so-called compositional unity and shapes the "object" under evaluation as the whole installation – doll, board, and stand – and its appearance, not only the doll itself. However, as he says *stö- stödar* ('sup- support') (not the correct conjugation in Swedish) in lines 11–12, he cups both of his hands and moves them up and down (see Image 1.4 and Image 1.5 in line 11), depicting the lack of support. This cupping gesture by the critic in line 11 evokes some ambiguous meaning potential, suggesting that the meaning of the verb *stödar* is something physical rather than aesthetic.

As regards the artist's responses in Extract 1, they are all neither negatively nor positively tilted: *okej* ('okay') and *jå* ('yeah') in lines 4, 6, 8, and 10 (see Green-Vänttinen 2001 for the use of *jå* in Finland Swedish). They merely acknowledge the critic's formulations, encouraging him to go on. Being minimal, they indicate a cautious handling of the initiated evaluation, which in Extract 1 is still being conceptualized. As the evaluation is developed incrementally in situ, the minimal responses are a subtle way of "doing" being the active listener. At the same time, the artist can follow where the critic is going in the conversation, until she has enough knowledge to respond in a more substantive way that would allow her to claim higher agency in the evaluative project. The role of the listener is also displayed by the artist's body posture: she sits still with clasped hands and merely follows the critic's unfolding talk, in which the problem is being formulated (see Images 1.1–1.3 in Extract 1).

4.1.2 Responses with hypothetical solutions

After the problem is formulated, the artist responds to the critic's statement and initiation of the evaluation by rising from her seated position and approaching the artwork while she produces an alternative solution with modal auxiliary verbs, suggesting that an extra plate could have provided better support for the doll installations standing on the boards (see Extract 2). The artist then elaborates on this alternative later in the same sequence (not shown in the transcript).



(2) *the alternative would have been*

Art: Artist

Crit: Critic

+ = critic's embodied conduct; ✕ = artist's embodied conduct

```
01 Art:      ✕jå: >jå det kan hända jā<
              yeah >yeah it can happen yes<
              art:      ✕gets up from seated pos.->
02 Art:      >alternative ✕sku ha vari< att köpa en sån hä:n # (2.0)
              >the alternative would have been< to buy one of these (2.0)
```

art: ␣----->␣approaches art work with palms down #im.2.1->

 im.2.1
 03 Art: en p- en annan platta som man sku ha haft (.) #så sku
 a p- another plate which you would have had (.) then it
 art: ␣---depict. hand gest. under artwork-----#im.2.2((cup. hands up&down))

 im.2.2
 04 Art: de kanske ha stött␣ ännu mera (0.2)
 would maybe have supported even more (0.2)
 art: ␣-----→␣
 05 Crit: .jå (.) [jå]
 .yeah (.) yeah
 06 Art: [om du menar] de=
 if you mean that=

Extract 2 (lines 1–4) shows the artist’s response to the critic’s statement in Extract 1 (section 4.1.1). In line 1, the artist first acknowledges the evaluation and aligns with it with the modal expression *jå det kan hända jā* (‘yeah it can happen yes’), suggesting that it is possible (but not necessarily the case) that the board is not supportive enough. In lines 2–4, the artist then suggests an alternative solution would be to buy another plate to place under the board that the doll is presently standing on. Then the whole doll installation would probably have been better supported. Here the modal auxiliary verb *skulle* (‘would’) and the past participles *ha varit* (‘have been’), *ha haft* (‘have had’), and *ha stött* (‘have supported’) depict an alternative world in which the critic’s demands could have been met. The lack of personal pronouns and the use of the generic Swedish pronoun *man* (‘one’), instead of the personal pronoun *jag* (‘I’), in line 3, also make this alternative solution merely hypothetical and somewhat distanced from the artist’s person and her own work process.

Furthermore, this alternative solution in Extract 2 above co-occurs with and is preceded by hand gestures that depict some sort of plate or support under the board (see Extract 2, Image 2.1, line 2). Worth mentioning here is that the gestures in Extract 2 (Image 2.2, line 3) are an echo of the critic’s gesture in Extract 1, with the cupped hands moving up and down under the board. Thus, the hypothetical solution presented here is a display of the artist’s understanding of the critic’s word “support” as something physical, referring to the process and the material aspects of the work. In Extract 2, the alternative solution is then followed by a controlling question *om du menar de* (‘if you mean that’) by the artist (line 6), suggesting that it is unclear for the artist exactly what the critic has in mind.

To conclude, by providing an alternative solution (illustrated in Extract 2), the artist can claim a higher level of agency, and indicate that she is not ultimately accepting the criticism without further consideration of her own (and perhaps more elaboration from the critic). It is also worth observing that, when the artist responds to the critic's initial evaluation in Extract 1, she does this by orienting towards one individual doll installation, using it as an example, rather than addressing the whole installation of dolls when responding to the critic's problem formulation. The individual work then becomes representative of a more broadly expressed criticism, making it possibly more manageable and constrained in its scope.

4.2 Phase two: analyzing the problem


The second phase occurs 4–5 minutes after the first part of the evaluative project concerning the dolls has been summed up. The topic of the board for the dolls is then revisited by the critic, who localizes the same compositional problem with one of the other dolls standing next to the one discussed earlier (see Image 1 in Section 3). Here the sequences are characterized by a contrastive element (illustrated in lines 1–2 in Extract 3, where the critic compares the first two doll installations that are standing opposite the other two dolls (see Image 2 in Section 3). The artist orients towards the critic, waits to see where he is going with the conversation, and repeats parts of, as well as finishes, the critic's utterances when the evaluations are expressed. One such sequence out of three during 2–3 minutes is illustrated in Extract 3 below.

Repeating and modifying fill-ins

In Extract 3 below, the critic returns to the assessment and scrutinization of the visual appearance of the boards. Prior to Extract 3, he has stated that the solution with the boards works well for the other two artworks standing opposite him, thanks to the installation's proportions (see Image 2). The critic's return to the boards that are more problematic is therefore initiated with the contrastive conjunction *men* ('but'), referring backwards in the interaction and signaling a shift.

(3) okay cheap solution yeah**Art: Artist****Crit: Critic****+ = critic's embodied conduct; Å = artist's embodied conduct**

```

01 Crit:          [men] >men om<
                but >but if<
02 Crit: +här e sam#ma Å[probl]e+m att Åliksom den här den här skivan=+
          here is the same      problem so like this this board=+
          crit: +.....#im.3.1-----+draws square around the board----->+
          
          crit:          im.3.1
03 Art:          Å[jå ]
                yes
                Ågaze to critic Ågaze to artwork----->Å
04 Art:          Å+=[jå ]=
                =yeah=
          crit:    +--gaze tow. artist->
          art:     Ågazing at critic--->
05 Crit:          =[se-] ser lite så där billig= ((draws contours around board))
                =lo- looks a bit sort of cheap=
06 Art:          =okej      (.) [>billig lösning ut jå:<] ((smiles))
                =okay      (.) >cheap solution yeah<
07 Crit:          [li:ksom i: i di där ] stora tankar [som den] hār=
                like in in those big thoughts which it has
08 Art:          [ok↑ej ]
                ok↑ay
09 Art:          =jå: ((nods gaze tow. artwork))
                =yeah
10              (2.5)

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In Extract 3 above, the same visual problem as in Extract 1 is first localized (line 2) with co-occurring demonstrative hand gestures in which the palms are facing down (see Image 3.1). The problem formulation is, however, not straightforward, with the hedging discourse particle *liksom* ('like') and the repetition of the demonstrative *den här* ('this'), co-occurring with the critic's depicting gesture as he draws an imaginary square around the board (see line 2). The evaluation that he then makes in line 5 *se- ser lite så där billig* ('looks a bit cheap') is also a bit hedged with *lite* ('a bit') and *så där* ('sort of'), and is, furthermore, grammatically incomplete as it lacks the particle to the phrasal verb *se ut* ('look like'). As in Extract 1, hedging seems to signal that the critique is, nevertheless, a delicate matter and subject to lesser epistemic access to the motives of the artwork.

However, the artist does not treat this evaluation as cautiously as the first one in Extract 1. She acknowledges the critic's turn with the minimal response *okej* ('okay') (line 6), smiling, but then continues her turn (see line 6) by repeating the adjective *billig* ('cheap') from the critic's turn, filling in the particle *ut* and adding the noun *lösning* ('solution'), with which

the adjective *billig* concords grammatically. She finishes this partial repeat with *jå* ('yeah'), which suggests that she can comprehend and take in the critic's characterization.

This repeating utterance (preceded and co-occurring with a smile) seems to have an identifying function. The choice of the added item *lösning* ('solution') alludes to earlier sequences in the evaluative project: to the alternative solution already provided in Extract 2, and to when the critic asked whether the idea of the installation had existed for a long time (not shown in the transcripts). The collaborative turn completion (with *billig lösning*; see Lerner 1991) is indicative of the artist claiming a higher level of agency in turn-taking, which reflects a similar, less cautious orientation to dealing with the criticism (note, for example, her smile in line 6). Hereby, the artist also partly transforms the critic's evaluative perspective, making it more her own.

To conclude, in this second phase, the critic's elaborations of the already initiated evaluation are intersubjectively sustained through the artist's repeating and modifying utterances that almost overlap with the critic's ongoing turn (see line 3 in Extract 3). The artist now has some earlier knowledge about the trajectory of the critic's evaluative project and can use parts of the critic's formulations in the formulations of her own understanding of the critique. The more active turn-taking and the repeats by the artist (one illustrated in Extract 3) seem to be a means to display a more profound understanding of the critic's evaluation but also to claim higher agency in the evaluative project, gaining possibilities to slightly modify or recontextualize the critic's words. Yet, the artist's own views and intentions remain non-verbalized.

4.3 Phase three: accepting the critique of the problem

In the third phase, which starts 34 minutes into the conversation, about ten minutes after the second phase of the evaluative project was summed up, the artist initiates a return to the evaluation of the board with an account of how it was the first time that she had tried out this kind of installation. In this phase, by overt agreements, a higher speaking tempo, certain discourse markers, and mirroring gestures, the artist is partly accepting the critique, partly making it her own by placing it within her perspective on the artwork in question. This change of the artist's discourse posture displays a deeper understanding of what the critic's evaluation was about and a claim of higher agency in the formulation of what is relevant about it.

4.3.1 Overt agreements and causal explanations


In Extract 4, the artist is initiating an explanation of why she is inclined to agree with the critic's evaluation of the board's visual appearance – such an account shows that the artist is capable of embracing the criticism but also of defining its terms. A little prior to the sequence, the critic has again asserted that, in his view, all parts in the artwork need to be motivated (see line 1).

(4) *I believe that you are right you see because*

Art: Artist

Crit: Critic

+ = critic's embodied conduct; Ꝁ = artist's embodied conduct

01 Crit: =sin liksom [sto:]ry [på någån sätt]=
=its like story in some way=
02 Art: [jå:]Ꝁ [>vet du <]
yes >you know<
art: Ꝁ----->Ꝁ ((gazing at critic))
03 Art: =jå: >Ꝁjag tycker att< jag Ꝁtror att du har >rätt sidu< för att när jag
=yes >I find that< I believe that you are >right you see< because when I
art: Ꝁ Ꝁgaze to artwork-----Ꝁ.....hand around stand under board->
04 Art: testa dom här, så (0.2) pt och när jag kom på den här idén, (.)
tested these, so (0.2) pt and when I came up with this idea, (.)
05 Art: >så för det Ꝁförsta< var den här lite större#re#Ꝁ=
>so first of all< this was a little bigger#re#=
art: Ꝁ.....arms around board-----#im.4.1 ((gaze to critic))

art: im.4.1
06 Crit: =jå[:å]
=ye:es

In Extract 4, the artist is now, contrary to the two preceding phases, eager to take the turn during the critic's ongoing talk with the acknowledging *jå* ('yeah') and the other-oriented Swedish discourse marker *vet du* ('you know') (see line 2). This already alludes to and displays shared understanding with the critic and invites him to mutual sense-making in the artist's terms.

The artist then takes the turn in line 3 with an overt agreement, first with the opinion format of *jag tycker* ('I find'), which then is modified into the epistemic *jag tror att du har rätt* ('I believe that you are right'). The verb *tycka* ('find, think') in Swedish conveys a subjective, non-factual opinion, while the verb *tro* ('believe') carries the meaning of holding something as likely based on some evidence (see SO 2009; Auer & Lindström 2016). Thus, the latter displays a greater conviction from the speaker than the prior choice of the stance-framing verb. Worth noticing is also that the artist now uses the personal pronoun 'I' rather than a construction with the generic Swedish pronoun *man* ('one'), as in Extract 2; all this is

indicative of claiming epistemic primacy and therefore a higher level of agency in the evaluative project.

This agreeing utterance is followed by another informal other-oriented discourse marker *sidu* ('you see'), common in colloquial Finland Swedish, and the causal connective *för att* (translated as 'because'), which both link the agreeing *jag tror att du har rätt* with the subsequent explanation, beginning with the subordinate temporal *när* ('when') in line 3. This *för att* clause is what Lindström and Londen (2003: 118) call a "predication-complementing causal construction," which functions as a link between units within an assertion. These hypotactic causals indicate a factual causality (Schiffrin 1987: 202), which can be seen in Extract 4, where the artist walks through the facts of the installation process of the work (lines 3–5), anchored in her experience and epistemic access: the board was initially bigger when the artist had tested the extra support mentioned in the alternative solution in Extract 2. Note that the whole explanative sequence beginning in line 5 is not included in the transcript.

The overt agreement of *jag tror du har rätt* and the *för att* causes are comparable to what Schutz (1953: 15–17) calls presenting a "because-motive," which is a retrospective explanation and requires a distance from the action. As the artist has developed a deeper understanding of the critic's evaluation during the conversation so far, the artist can appreciate the point of the critique but also claim a more independent position by giving accounts for her choices – aspects of the work she has epistemic access to and which also lend her epistemic primacy.

4.3.2 *Mirroring of gestures and assessing the criticism*


As regards gestures, the third phase of the evaluation of the visual appearance of the doll board also demonstrates an acceptance of the critique (see Extract 5, Image 5.1). A little prior to Extract 5, the artist has already explained that the dimension of the board was bigger initially when she had an extra support under the board (referred to in section 4.3.1). This description co-occurs with hand movements around the board where the doll is standing (see Extract 4, line 5, Image 4.1).

(5) so it can surely be that

Art: Artist

Crit: Critic

+ = critic's embodied conduct; ✎ = artist's embodied conduct

01 Art: [>✎så det kan nog hä]nda?< att
>so it can surely be?< that
art: ✎ ✎.....arms around->
02 Crit: [just]
right
03 Art: att de va du ser=✎
that that what you see=
art: ✎--board----->✎
04 Crit: =jä
=yes
05 Art: =att du märker att ja ha (.) ✎<kanske (.) [må]s]ta> [att]✎
=that you notice that I have (.) <maybe (.) had to> so
art: ✎--steps back from artwork---✎--depict. gest. in air----->✎
06 Crit: [jä] [jä]
yeah yeah
07 Art: att ja sen [ha fått]
so I then have got
08 Crit: + [>de behöver] på någån sätt< mera utry[mme#]
>they need in some way< more space
crit: + +---depict. gest. with arms-----#im.5.1
im.5.1
09 Art: ✎[>(de sku ft st-)<]
(it would have)
✎-appr. aw raised arms-->
10 Art: +vara+ mera=
be more=
crit: +,,,,+
art: ✎--arms around board->
11 Crit: =jä [jä]
=yes yes
12 Art: [jä] (.) de e sant som du säger=
yes (.) it is true as you say=

In Extract 5 above, the artist expands her turn further (see lines 1–7), beginning with *så det kan nog hända* ('so it can surely be') in line 1. This starts a concluding sequence of the agreement and the explanation already given in Extract 4 (see Schiffrin 1987: 201–204). Alongside this resolution, she moves her hands around the board in lines 1–3 and then again in line 5, depicting and encompassing the whole work, and not just the actual board that has been discussed earlier, thus making a shift in the scope of assessment talk, independently of the critic.

When the critic then takes the turn and asserts that the installation needs more space (line 8), he simultaneously with the verbal utterance copies the gesture of the artist in Extract 4, Image 4.1, accepting the broadened focus on the installation. The artist, who then begins to talk in overlap, does the same gesture with what seems to be (an aborted) verbal confirmation of the critic's assertion (see lines 9–10). Both the artist and the critic are thus

confirming achieved intersubjectivity in this interactional location. The artist then finalizes the sequence with the overt agreement *jå de e sant som du säger* ('yes it is true as you say') in line 12, which at the same time is an assessment of what the critic has said; in other words, the artist is claiming epistemic primacy by signaling that she is now in a position to accept or dismiss the critic's evaluation.

Consequently, in this third phase of the evaluative project scrutinized in this study, the artist displays a deeper understanding of the critic's evaluations, which enables her to claim a higher level of agency in the evaluative project. Through overt agreements, a higher speaking tempo, certain discourse markers, explanations of her choices, and gestures the artist takes a more independent stance towards the critique and constrains certain aspects of it. This change of the artist's discourse posture suggests that the critic's initial evaluation in 4.1 had to be elaborated on and further analyzed in 4.2 to be manageable and acceptable for the artist, so that she can *deal with* the threat that such criticism potentially means for her artistic identity, as illustrated in Extracts 4 and 5 above.

5 Concluding discussion

This study has focused on the intricate business of a spoken evaluative project between an artist and a critic in the form of a backstage face-to-face studio critique session, in which the participants have to deal not only with asymmetries concerning agency, and epistemic access and primacy, but also with the potential threats that follow from the act of being critiqued and evaluated. In a fine-grained way, this study has been able to demonstrate that the agency constellations and other positionings concerning epistemic primacy and access are negotiable and rely on an intersubjective understanding of the mutually negotiated trajectories of the evaluative discourse. Evidently, evaluative criticism is not only a one-way dictation of how something should be, but an interactional achievement that entails not only various operations, such as description, contextualization, and analysis (see Carroll 2009), but also exchanges of interpersonal positioning between the assessor and the object of the assessment.

As criticism is potentially face-threatening, especially in face-to-face encounters (see Goffman 1967), evaluations are not necessarily delivered in a straightforward manner, which this study has also demonstrated. Rather, in this case (see also Erickson 2011 for indirection in other gatekeeping encounters), they are quite hedged in various ways, making them subtle and perhaps harder to grasp immediately. The artist's cautious handling of the critic's initiated critique (illustrated in Extract 1) is an indication of this. It might not be clear to the artist in which direction the critic is going with the initiated evaluation, and what

exactly is being evaluated. The critic is addressing the visual appearance of the whole composition concerning the doll installation, while the artist is commenting on the material, and supportive aspects of the work.

Simultaneously, the cautious handling of the critique may also be a dismissal of it, but whether the artist finds the critique valid or not, it is in any case something that she must deal with along the trajectory of the evaluative project, especially as the evaluation about the doll installation is again addressed after a while in the conversation. Along the trajectory of this evaluative project the artist is then modifying and partly transforming the criticism, thus claiming a higher agency and independence as an assessor of the artistic outcome – the critique raised by the critic is something that she could have arrived at herself.

This earned independence as an assessor is partly achieved through overtly agreeing with the critic. This handling of the evaluations suggests something of a ritual character that these encounters may have, meaning that they form an important part of the profession (see Thornton 2008: 196). It might not matter whether you personally agree or not as long as you act your part in the role you have been given. The artist is doing 'being an artist' by going along with the evaluation, accepting the critique, but only after having modified and partly transformed it on her own terms, and the critic is doing 'being a critic' by evaluating the art in the first place.

Despite the potential threats that evaluations bring about, it is still favorable for artists to interact with critics and other gatekeepers, such as museum directors, curators, and editors, in order to promote their art. But although critique sessions are favorable and necessary encounters, the format of the sessions is not standardized and routinized, possibly because they have a private character and do not follow a strict agenda. Unlike other types of professional discourse, such as doctor-patient interaction, classroom interaction, and courtroom interaction, there is no authorized agreement on the institutional guidelines for art criticism, meaning what should be assessed and how (Adelswärd 1995; Heikkilä 2012).

Although the critic in this case study has no direct executive power over the artist's career – compared to that of a curator, reviewer, or collector – he still has the symbolic power to assess the artworks, which he does. However, his mitigation of his epistemic primacy and the artist's claims for higher agency function as strategies of negotiation, and possibly of questioning, the power relations between them. Consequently, these critique sessions provide information about existing norms and power relations, as well as ambiguities in relation to these (see Sarangi & Roberts 1999), and how some aspects about them can be transformed. Thus, these findings can enrich the research fields of interactional studies and professional discourse studies – where the cultural field is still under-researched – with further knowledge on social interaction from a specific communicative setting, while also

providing new methodological knowledge to the field of art sociology, art criticism, and art studies. In addition, the findings of this article can be of value to practicing artists and critics, as well as within art educations in which critique sessions are held and practiced.

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Appendix: Transcription symbols

Verbal talk:

[]	simultaneous speech
(.)	micropause (less than 0.2 seconds)
(0.5)	pause and its length in seconds
=	latching between utterances
vänt-	cut-off word
jå:	lengthening of previous sound
i	speaker emphasis
pt	clicking sound
.h/.hh	in-breath shorter/longer
.jå	in-breath on word
><	rushed talk
<>	slower talk
.	falling intonation
,	continuing intonation
?	rising intonation
↑	marked rise in pitch
↓	marked fall in pitch
(())	transcriber's comment
()	uncertain transcription

Embodied conduct:

+--->	The action described continues across subsequent lines
--->+	until the same symbol is reached.
>>	The action described begins before the excerpt starts
--->>	The action described continues after the excerpt ends
.....	Preparation of the action (e.g. rising an arm).
----	Maintaining of the action (e.g. pointing)
,,,,,	Retraction of the action (e.g. arm retracting)