

**Artistic**  
**Research:**  
**Methods –**  
**Development**  
**of a**  
**Discourse –**  
**Current Risks**

Corina Caduff

Im Laufe der vergangenen Jahre hat die künstlerische Forschung in allen künstlerischen Disziplinen vermehrt an Bedeutung gewonnen (ausser der Literatur). Zum Vorschein kam dabei eine Vielzahl von Ansätzen. Künstlerische Forschung zielt darauf ab, bessere Kunst/besseres Design zu entwickeln oder innovatives wissenschaftliches Wissen zu generieren – und sogar einen eigenen Raum zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft festzulegen.

Wie hat sich der Diskurs in der künstlerischen Forschung in den letzten Jahren entwickelt? Wie verortet sich die Verschränkung künstlerischer Praxen und wissenschaftlicher Methoden? Eine spezifische Betrachtungsweise beinhaltet die Art der Kollaboration: Als Grundregel lässt sich erkennen, dass in kollaborativ angelegten Projekten die wissenschaftliche Methode grössere Bedeutung besitzt.

Der Beitrag befasst sich auch mit dem aktuellen Risiko, dass sich innerhalb des Feldes der künstlerischen Forschung ein Graben zwischen dem, was Kunstforschende tun, und dem, was Theoretikerinnen und Theoretiker darüber zu sagen haben, auftun könnte.

Artistic Research: Methods –  
Development of a Discourse – Current Risks

Corina Caduff

There is no question: artistic research has developed unstoppably. In the environment of art schools it has been growing for more than ten years now. For artists it is both art practice *and* practice-based research or application-oriented basic research. The results of artistic research are works of art *and* scientific knowledge. The growing significance can be viewed from the perspectives of discourse, institutions and funding policy.

The fact that artistic research is increasingly gaining discursive importance is documented by a continuously growing number of text publications, especially publications produced for conferences and anthologies focusing on the epistemology of artistic research in different countries and disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Worth highlighting is the Journal for Artistic Research, which was launched in 2011 and has since developed into a central publication medium (in 2015, more than seventy selected artistic research projects from different artistic disciplines were presented in ten editions).<sup>2</sup>

Along with the growing debate about artistic research we can also observe an increasing institutionalisation, which is manifested in the corresponding foundation of research areas, research institutes, doctoral programmes or teaching modules in master's programmes.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, one can also speak of an increasing significance in the field of funding policy: in a number of European countries, national research funding organizations support artistic research with their programmes. The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) has promoted artistic research since 2004, the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) since 2009. As yet the German Research Foundation (DFG) has not completely gone along with these efforts; an application for the creation of the new subject "Artistic Research/Art Research", submitted in the context of a review of the subject structure, was turned down in 2015.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Judith Siegmund (ed.): *Wie verändert sich Kunst, wenn man sie als künstlerische Forschung versteht?* (Bielefeld 2016); Doris Carstensen, Ulf Bästlein et al. *Künstlerische Forschung an Hochschulen und Universitäten – zwischen Idee, Skizze und Realisierung*, in: *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung*, 10/1, March 2015; <http://www.zthe.at/index.php/zthe/issue/view/44>; Elva Lilja: *Art, Research, Empowerment – The Artist as Researcher* (Stockholm 2015); Henk Borgdorff: *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (Amsterdam 2012); Janet Ritterman, Gerald Bast, Jürgen Mittelstraß (eds.): *Kunst und Forschung. Können Künstler Forscher sein? Art and Research: Can Artists be Researchers?* (Vienna, New York 2011); Corina Caduff, Fiona Siegenthaler, Tan Wälchli (eds.): *Art and Artistic Research/ Kunst und Künstlerische Forschung* (Zurich 2010).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jar-online.net/>

<sup>3</sup> E.g. the artistic PhD at the art universities of Graz (since 2009/10) Linz (since 2010/11) and the Graduate School of the Arts in Bern (Cooperation between the Bern University of the Arts and the University of Bern, which allows researching artists to do a doctorate; pilot phase 2011–2014); or the extramural Institute for Artistic Research founded in 2009 ([www.artistic-research.de](http://www.artistic-research.de)).

## Methods

The discourse of artistic research emerged, in the 1990s, in Anglophone countries and Scandinavia, initially established in Visual Arts departments of art schools. Today it has also reached the fields of design, theatre, film, music and dance. The fact that artistic research unites so many different artistic disciplines under the roof of one discourse is a great achievement. Only literature/fiction is not included. The reason why authors are not able to partake in the discourse on artistic research may be because the subject Creative Writing is established not in art schools but in universities – in Anglophone countries traditionally in the English Language departments.<sup>4</sup>

The discourse and the practices of artistic research are to be found across different artistic disciplines, albeit with different disciplinary backgrounds. It is therefore clear that there cannot be one method of artistic research which recent studies have consistently stated: “Artistic research does not have any one distinct, exclusive methodology,” says the Dutch art historian Henk Borgdorff, adding that it’s fundamental “to therefore argue for methodological pluralism.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar manner the German philosopher and artist Anke Haarmann rejects any kind of “regulating methodology”.<sup>6</sup> Generally there is a clear tendency to advocate methodological diversity.

In general, scientific methods are disclosed: question, path of knowledge and results are set out explicitly and are therefore understandable. Artistic methods, however, are traditionally not disclosed. Usually the steps remain covert, the artistic result “speaks for itself”. Artistic research, however, exists through the connection of these two worlds. Methodological pluralism is manifested by a countless number of artistic research projects, especially because they are located in different artistic disciplines and distinctly refer to different scientific contexts.

### Entanglement of Artistic Practice with Scientific Methods

A few project examples may help to demonstrate the diversity of the corresponding entanglement of artistic practice with scientific methods as well as the diversity of goals.

In *Unfolding Waves* (2014), the composer, musicologist and artist-researcher Paolo de Assis (Orpheus Institute, Ghent) scientifically and artistically addresses Nono’s piece *sofferte onde serene* (for piano and tape, 1975–77).<sup>7</sup> He presents seven modules with very distinct approaches (among others musicological analysis, recording of a lecture about the piece, recordings of performances on the piano). Paolo de

<sup>4</sup> See Corina Caduff: *Literature and Artistic Research*, in: Caduff et al (see note 1), pp. 98–105.

<sup>5</sup> Henk Borgdorff: *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (Amsterdam 2012), p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> Anke Haarmann: “Methodologie”, in: Jens Badura, Selma Dubach, Anke Haarmann, Dieter Mersch, Anton Rey, Christoph Schenker, Germán Toro Pérez (eds.): *Künstlerische Forschung. Ein Handbuch* (Zurich 2015), pp. 85–88.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/51263/51264>

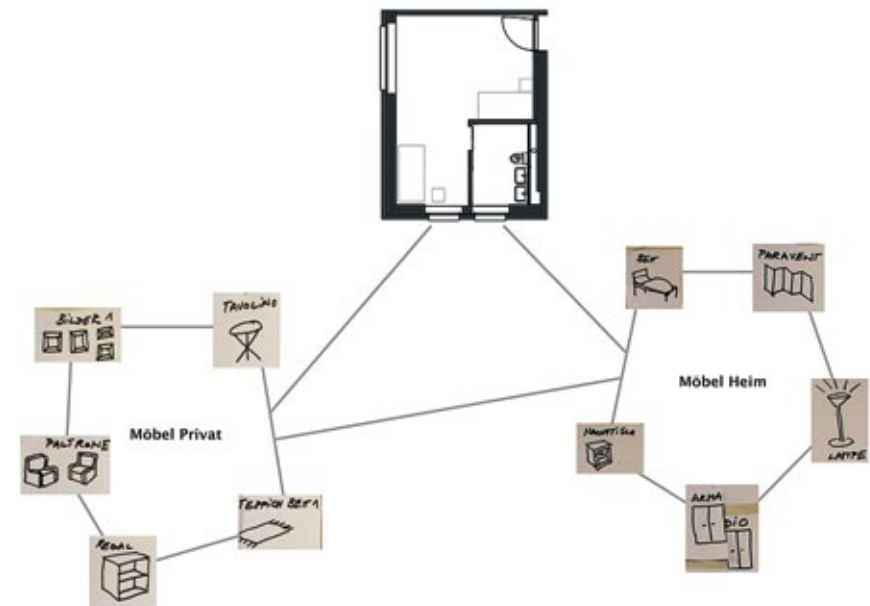
Assis says of his method: “The crucial point is the fluid and bi-directional transition from ‘mainly research’ to ‘mainly artistic practice.’”<sup>8</sup> The aim is for science and art to fertilise each other and for artistic research to constitute an independent space between the two.

There are artistic research projects in which the artistic researchers work by themselves, applying aesthetic means and methods (practice-based research), and there are those that are meant for collaboration (artistic-scientific research). As a rule one can say that the more collaborative the project is meant to be, the more the scientific method comes to the foreground, as the following examples show:

In the project *CommuniCare. Communication design for long-term care facilities* (2013–2016, Bern University of the Arts) by the communication designer Arne Scheuermann, the research team collected data in two nursing homes: they conducted qualitative interviews with nursing staff and the residents about their use of the premises. This was complemented by participant observation in order to find out how the residents were using the rooms’ interior design and their objects. Here, socio-scientific methods of data collection were used. The goal of the project was to propose improvements in the design which were afterwards validated by the residents in interviews.

<sup>8</sup> E-Mail from Paulo de Assis to Corina Caduff, 23/5/2016.

### Privater Bereich



Furniture in a double room: personal furniture as well as furniture provided by the retirement home © Minou Afzali

In Basel, in the border region of Switzerland-Germany-France, the research team working with the video director and researcher Flavia Caviezel examined sections of the river Rhine for the purpose of making its role as a communication system for its human and non-human environment visible and representable (FHNW Academy of Art and Design: *RhyCycling – Esthetics of Sustainability in the Basel Border Area*, 2010 to 2013; *Times of Waste*, 2015–2017).

The studies were located at the intersection of media art and visual anthropology. They were carried out using ethnographic methods (inspections, audio and video recordings in and around the Rhine) and contributed to an innovative method of gaining new scientific knowledge. They show, for example, that interdependencies between human and non-human environments are a necessity for achieving sustainability.

This summary makes clear how different the projects are in terms of topic, procedure, question and goal. And yet they have at least one factor in common: the entanglement of artistic and creative practice with scientific methods, even if the degree of the entanglement varies from project to project.

#### Collaboration: Artistic-scientific Research

Over the last few years, collaborations between artists and scientists have become increasingly methodically constitutive. What is taking place is an increasing entanglement of the sciences and art, based on the combination of analytical and aesthetic practices. The general objective of this combination is the experimental testing of innovative work methods and results. Artistic-scientific research therefore constitutes a specifically collaborative type of artistic research. In Switzerland and Austria, funding agencies exert influence on the formation of methods by demanding methodical expertise, which artists try to achieve by establishing collaborations with humanities scholars and/or natural scientists.<sup>9</sup>

Such collaborative projects in the field of artistic research have the potential not only to change the forms of artistic practice but also to question traditional scientific methods and to shake up the (self-)understanding of science and the humanities: academic humanities scholars, who study the arts, are used to having the last word. In collaborations with artists this last word is seriously questioned: the so-called secondary speech, which in the end exposes the true meaning of the art, has the tendency of being invalidated within the framework of equal collaboration. Furthermore, humanities scholars are not used to sharing authorship.

<sup>9</sup> Overview of thematic issues, approaches, team constellations and project orientation of artistic research projects carried out in Switzerland between 2000 and 2015: Flavia Caviezel, Priska Gisler: *All we need is (Art) Research?* (Basel: Swiss Artistic Research Network (SARN) 2015), pp. 4–18; [https://issuu.com/swissartisticresearch-network/docs/4sarnbooklet\\_web](https://issuu.com/swissartisticresearch-network/docs/4sarnbooklet_web).





Times of Waste: Granules resulting from the recycling process of e-waste at Immark AG Regensdorf/Switzerland (electronics recycling plant)  
© Forschungsteam Times of Waste 2015

The art scholar Kathrin Busch has pointed out the “*skandalon*” evolving around artistic research by speaking of the necessity to “draw completely new boundaries” between artistic and scientific methods.<sup>10</sup>

But even the artist’s attitude may change when working with scientists, as in the case of the Zurich actress and drama teacher Liliana Heimberg, who, along with theatre scholars, has carried out several projects related to open-air theatre and who, as a sustainable result of these collaborations, states: “My way of teaching has become completely different”<sup>11</sup> – it is now analogous with the research setting: more open, more exploratory, less focused on the mere teaching content. This may have a profound impact on the arts of tomorrow.

Artistic research is thus a productive and arguable approach for stirring up the field of artistic-scientific relations. If projects are run well – at eye level – they can produce a change in the self-understanding and working practices on both sides.

#### Development of the Discourse

A central parameter to assess the quality of a discourse is its development. A professional discourse around artistic research was developed in the so-called “noughties” when a number of project presentations with hardly any professional background began emerging, and it was for a long time dominated by a variety of efforts to redefine artistic research repeatedly – a classical means of identity formation. Furthermore, these initial attempts focused on generally describing the effect of “knowledge production” in artistic research (for instance in the form of so-called *embodied knowledge*, *tacit knowledge*, or as the often repeated specification of *research into art*, *for art*, *through art*). Meanwhile, these forced attempts to find a definition have subsided. Instead, the focus has shifted more to concentrating on the collaborative and transdisciplinary modes of artistic research as well as to the question of how artistic research even changes scientific systems. Moreover, empirical surveys are being attempted at art schools in order to find out what contribution artistic research makes to artistic education.<sup>12</sup>

What the development of artistic research shows is that the initial phase of self-discovery, self-assurance and establishment is completed.

This is accompanied by a decline in the hostility with which artistic research was confronted in its own ranks as well as on the part of academies. In particular, the accusation that artistic research results in an academization of the arts has become less frequent. Universities,

<sup>10</sup> Kathrin Busch: “Wissenskünste. Künstlerische Forschung und ästhetisches Denken”, in: Elke Bippus (ed.), *Kunst des Forschens. Praxis eines ästhetischen Denkens* (Zurich, Berlin 2009), p.144.

<sup>11</sup> Le-Wan Tran et al.: *Transdisziplinäre Forschungsprojekte an der Zürcher Hochschule der Künste. Ein Untersuchungsbericht* (Zurich 2011), p. 112.

<sup>12</sup> See Christina Buck, Sandra Hofhues, Johanna Schindler: “Künstlerische Forschung unter Bildungsperspektive: individualisierte Studienprogramme?” in: *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung*, 10/1, March 2015, pp. 53–77; <http://www.zthe.at/index.php/zthe/issue/view/44c>

which initially reacted obviously defensively to artistic research, are increasingly opening up to the approach. However, one gets the impression that the humanities in particular, which are currently fighting to defend their societal relevance, adorn themselves with artists because these enjoy a certain degree of status in the cultural sector, but, at the same time, that these disciplines are little interested in calling into question their own methods by means of artistic research. As yet, an artistic PhD is still widely rejected in the field of academic art studies.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, artistic research has gained respectability and public participation in research seems to have become increasingly suitable and popular, as evidenced by the intensifying debate about artistic research and the public. Institutions of the cultural sector serve as cooperation partners for artistic research while persons with practical experience operate as consultants for artistic research projects (such as film producers or representatives of public authorities), while artistic research projects encourage participatory elements that address the general public, such as the audiowalk in the above mentioned project *Times of Waste* which provides an interested audience the opportunity of gaining insight into the project as well as the chance to comment on it.

#### Best Practice, Canon Formation

In order to standardize a professional discourse it is necessary to agree on a “best practice”. An agreement of this kind would foster the growth of a community. However, such a thing does not exist; instead, there is the question of whether it makes sense to categorize works as canonical, a question which creates a persisting field of tension.

A “key gap (...) is the absence of paradigmatic works within the space of artistic research. (...) there appear to be no foundational works that serve as basic referents for the subsequent development of a field of debate. Indeed, for many protagonists within the debate on artistic research, it would seem that the institution of a paradigmatic or canonical work would be counter-productive and stand in opposition to the radical alterity of artistic research. (...) In that sense, what is defined here as a ‘key gap’ may be regarded as a key virtue.”<sup>14</sup>

So, due to the lack of a canon we are – and have been for years – situated somewhere between “key gap” and “key virtue”.

Moreover, the individual disciplinary subsections – music, visual arts, theatre, and so on – have difficulty in agreeing on paradigmatic works of artistic research. Why? One key reason is citability: Like artists,

<sup>13</sup> This was, among others, expressed in the FAZ by a number of art scholars who, with sweeping blows, tried to establish themselves as FAZ authors. See Peter Geimer: “Das große Recherche-Getue in der Kunst. Sollen Hochschulen ‘Master of Arts’-Titel und Doktorhüte für Malerei verleihen?”, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20/4/2011, N 5, as well as Daniel Hornuf: “Praxis Dr. Kunst geschlossen”, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1/8/2015. On this aspect, see also Borgdorff 2012, (see note 1), pp. 56ff., and also Mick Wilson, Schelte van Ruiten (eds.): *Share. Handbook for Artistic Research Education* (Amsterdam 2013), pp. 8–33.

<sup>14</sup> Mick Wilson, Schelte van Ruiten (eds.): *Share. Handbook for Artistic Research Education*. (Amsterdam 2013), p. 31.

artistic researchers rarely cite the works of other artistic researchers; for them it is an artistic rather than a scientific practice. But a citation is dialogical, sustainable and, above all, it genuinely aims at the formation and development of a discourse. If it is not practised, the development of a discourse is put into question. So there is much need for action in this area.

Nevertheless, there is an ongoing qualification of artistic research projects, such as in the case of a project outline for a doctoral work, when articles are to be published in art magazines or artistic research projects are submitted for funding. In that case they are assessed by community members on the basis of common scientific criteria (relevance, originality, innovation, validity of the method used). Such assessments are conducted by peers, in other words, there is indeed an affiliation, that is, there is an underlying professional discourse. And there are peers: community members who practise and develop the discourse from within their respective artistic discipline. A systematic examination of such assessments is still pending. It could provide important additional indications for the development of the discourse.

#### Current Risks

##### The Splitting of the Field of Artistic Research

As mentioned at the beginning, the discourse of artistic research is made up of the many anthologies and articles that deal with artistic research. The book and text layers, central to the development of a discourse, are today dominated by theorists. Put bluntly: philosophers, media scientists, and literary and art scholars, traditionally socialized in an academic context and not active as artists have taken over the field and shaped a discourse which does not specifically refer to the projects carried out in the context of artistic research. As an example one could name the groundbreaking book *The Conflict of the Faculties. Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (2012) by Henk Borgdorff, the leading theoretician on artistic research: the monograph has 280 pages but not a single artistic project is mentioned in the book. Numerous other publications also have institutional structures in their sights. Even artists write books about artistic research without debating specific projects. The choreographer, dancer and multimedia artist Efva Lilja, for example, has written the highly interesting and politically very committed 120–page long study *Art, Research, Empowerment* (2015) on artistic research but pays no attention at all to the aesthetic dimensions.

Artistic research has also been used to criticize the splitting of art studies from artistic practice. We must now take care that such a split is not repeated within the field of artistic research. The relation to the works must be maintained, and care must be taken not only that the artists' voices become more prominent within the field, but also that they cite the works of their colleagues and, by doing so, jointly form a discourse in which artistic research projects become better and more visible on a sustained basis. Maybe the theoreticians, who today act as the mouthpieces of artistic research, are in the long run only the midwives of artistic research in its foundation phase.

### Artistic Research: No Niche in Art Schools

It now seems valid that the ideal teaching staff at art schools does not only teach and is artistically active but also does research. Investment in artistic research represents an intensified, research-based expansion of qualitative artistic practices. It is therefore important for art schools not to offer artistic research as a separate module or as a separate study course.<sup>15</sup> There shouldn't be both art and artistic research; there shouldn't be both practising students and research students. Rather, there should be an understanding of art that naturally includes research in a qualitative-explicit way.

As the above-mentioned examples indicate, artistic research can have different goals. It can

- form an original and independent space between art and academia (→ *Unfolding Waves*)
- be explicitly research-based art/design (→ *CommuniCare*)
- contribute qua innovative methods to new scientific knowledge (→ *RhyCycling; Times of Waste*)

The logical conclusion of this view on artistic research from the perspective of art education is the artistic PhD. Over the last century it was gradually introduced in the UK, Japan, Australia and Scandinavia. As part of the Bologna reform it began springing up in southern, western and eastern European countries after 2000, and it also exists in the USA, Canada and China. According to Elkins, in 2013 there were around 280 institutions offering an artistic PhD; today there might be even more.<sup>16</sup> Swiss art schools are not yet qualified to award doctorates but there is the possibility of cooperating with PhD-granting institutions and it's time to make increased use of these possibilities for a new, young and innovative generation of artists and artistic researchers to develop.

<sup>15</sup> Also see Dieter Lesage: "The institutions, which besides their art degrees now also offer artistic research degree programmes, are making a huge mistake." Dieter Lesage: "Akademisierung", in: Jens Badura, Selma Dubach, Anke Haarmann et al. (eds.): *Künstlerische Forschung. Ein Handbuch* (Zurich, Berlin 2015), p. 223.

<sup>16</sup> James Elkins: "Six Cultures of the PhD", in: Mick Wilson, Schelte van Ruiten (eds.): *Share. Handbook for Artistic Research Education*. (Amsterdam 2013), p. 10.