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ART AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH

Edited by Corina Caduff, Fiona Siegenthaler, Tan Wälchli

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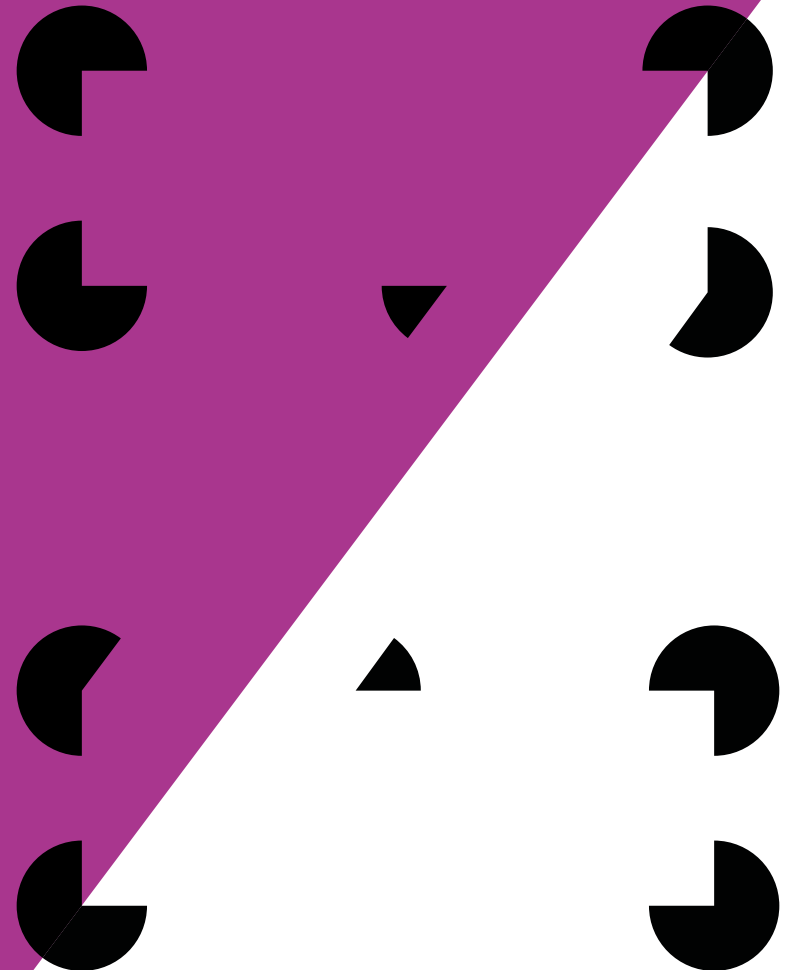
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LITERATURE AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH

Corina Caduff

In its beginnings in the 1990s the artistic research discourse centered mainly on the visual arts from which it arose. In recent years, however, an increasing number of relevant studies have appeared from the fields of design, theater, and film—joined increasingly by music and dance—in the context of artistic research. The reasons for any particular discipline's delayed entry into the discourse—as well as for the successive geographical spread from the English-speaking countries to Scandinavia and the Netherlands and most recently to the German-speaking and Eastern European countries—can be found primarily in the degree to which PhD programs have an artistic research component in a given field.

In what follows, a field will be discussed that, to the best of my knowledge, has yet to be raised in the debates about artistic research: literature. Discussions about whether or not artistic research should have a written component highlight this omission. The different views range from explicit requirement—"artistic research . . . must include (apart from everything else) a linguistic part"¹—to decided rejection—"The results of artistic research are artworks, not texts."² And yet, the possibility that a text can also be a literary text is not taken into account by either position. This is not just due to a general concentration on the visual arts, but also to the fact that within the scope of artistic research the position with respect to "text" is essentially a position with respect to traditional academic research, generally articulated in the written form. Thus the word "text" is used almost as a synonym for theory or metalanguage. This seems unproblematic, possibly because belletristic text has yet to enter the discourse of artistic research. But why? Why has literature been left out of this discourse?

1 Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices* (Helsinki, 2005), p. 165. See also Philip Ursprung, who also calls for artistic research projects to feature a linguistic commentary ("a media shift to language is needed" [trans. J.F.]): Florian Dombos and Philip Ursprung, "Kunst und Forschung: Ein Kriterienkatalog und eine Replik dazu," *Kunst-Bulletin 4* (2006), p. 34.

CREATIVE WRITING

The reasons for this absence are essentially of an institutional nature. While the field of creative writing is available as a type of professional literary training—analogueous to studies in photography, film, painting, music, theater, etc.—only in exceptional cases is it found at art academies or art universities. As a rule it is found—where it exists at all—at universities in the field of literature and cultural studies; in the U.S. and Great Britain, traditionally within English departments.³

Programs in creative writing emerged at American universities in the postwar period, while in Eastern bloc countries elite literary schools operated for socialist literature, some of which continued (and continue) to exist after the caesura of 1989 (such as the famous Gorky Institute in Moscow). Since the 1970s, university creative writing programs have also spread to Great Britain and Scandinavia, then to Western Europe and other continents.

In German-speaking countries creative writing has scant academic tradition and program opportunities are few. The most famous is the Deutsche Literaturinstitut attached to the University of Leipzig (formerly Literaturinstitut J.R. Becher, founded in 1955 by decree of the GDR government). The German Studies department at the University of Munich offers literary writing courses for those interested, and the University of Hildesheim offers creative writing as part of cultural studies. In Vienna there is the independent Schule für Dichtung, which was founded in 1991 by an authors' collective, and in Switzerland the literary writing program has existed since 2006 and—this is an exceptional case—is run by the Hochschule der Künste Bern. In autumn 2005, a European meeting of various creative writing programs took place for the first time in Leipzig, from which the European Network of Creative Writing Programmes emerged.⁴

The institutional tradition, history, and cultural significance of creative writing vary widely depending on country and language area,

2 Christoph Schenker, "Kunst als Forschung," in *Kunstklasse, Studiengang Bildende Kunst, Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst Zürich: Inserts, Texte, Statements*, ed. Peter Emch et al. (Zurich, 1998), p. 28.

3 On the concrete situation of creative writing see: Graeme Harper, Jeri Kroll, *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy* (Clevedon, 2008).

4 See <http://sfd.at/akademie/2005/projekte/sub/04/#members> (accessed 7/10/2009).

a fact reflected in the distinct academic titles offered: while in the U.S., Australia, Great Britain, and Scandinavia studies can be completed at the PhD level, in German-speaking countries a BA is currently the highest possible graduate qualification. And while a PhD in creative writing is possible, it is, as a rule, made up of two parts—along the lines of a PhD in other fields of arts education. It consists of a literary text (creative work), such as a novella or a collection of short stories, and an academic thesis, i.e. an analytical text *about* literature.

Because creative writing is primarily found in a university's language and literature departments, it is rarely appreciated as related to other forms of arts education, which are often all offered under the same roof. This perhaps explains why, to date, discussions about artistic research, still generally taking place at art universities, rarely include literature. Two questions thereby arise which will be addressed below:

- How is artistic research to be conceived with regard to literature, how does such research within literature work, and how does literature based upon artistic research best distinguish itself from literature that does not carry out such research?
- To what extent can reflection about literary research be integrated into the present discourse on artistic research and what institutional considerations arise as a result?

LITERARY RESEARCH

Like every other art form, literature is based on existing social, psychological, political, historical, and aesthetic knowledge, which it questions, criticizes, illuminates, and further develops by means of language or, as in the case of light fiction, merely reproduces. A broad range of possibilities exist to accomplish this: writers can orient themselves on their own experience; they can describe what they perceive and imagine; and they can actively include other systems of knowledge such as archives, encyclopedias, and scientific research.

If the aim is to classify works as literary research, a clearly defined research concept is required. For example, it is not enough that the writer's own perceptions and reflections are transformed into literature, or that literary activity in itself is defined as research. In order to

circumscribe the specific research activity of literary research, I propose to identify three characteristics as examples based upon a novel (*Blueprint Blaupause* by Charlotte Kerner, 1999):

- The question under investigation is clearly recognizable in the literary text and also expounded in paratexts, such as the publisher's catalogue, the blurb, and the preface or afterword.
The novel *Blueprint Blaupause* is about an unusual mother-daughter relationship: the mother is a famous pianist who has herself cloned in order to preserve her musical talent. The problem is immediately recognizable from the text of the novel as well as from the paratexts (blurb, epilogue, and afterword): what would a human clone's existence mean in reality and what problems would a human clone have to contend with?
- The questioning of non-literary systems of knowledge is clearly recognizable.
Years later the fertility doctor who carried out the cloning explains the biotechnical cloning procedure to the child. As an epilogue, the novel contains a fictional scientific report on the first generation of clones. In the afterword, the author gives information about the biological history of cloning, and in a concluding acknowledgement she lists scientific publications utilized for the novel.
- The relevant knowledge is carried over into literary narrative and dealt with in specific points.
The novel broaches the massive identity problems with which a human clone could be confronted. To that effect it intervenes in the bio-scientific cloning debate with a literary imagination.

Literary research deals with a literary exploration of knowledge the author has acquired outside literature, with which she looks into a specific question and which she subsequently stages in a literary manner. Other concrete examples would be: Thomas Lehr's novel *42* (2005), which is set at CERN and is about a kind of fold in time theoretically supported by relativity theory; all the clone novels which appeared around 2000 after the cloning of the sheep Dolly and in which biological cloning

techniques (transfer of the cell nucleus of an adult cell to an isolated egg cell which has no nucleus, etc.) are explained systematically and in detail;⁵ and Kathrin Röggl's novel *Wir schlafen nicht* (We do not sleep, 2004), for which the author interviewed two dozen representatives from the field of consulting and IT in order to capture the language of the sector; and many others.

Literature which can be described as literary research under the aforementioned criteria amounts to a relatively small proportion of all creative fiction, the majority of which is devoted to the great anthropological themes such as love, death, betrayal, infidelity, and violence, which are repeatedly retold in the form of personal stories. In contrast, for its part literary research frequently concerns itself with specific themes of the time: it reacts to political, technological, or bio-scientific developments and pursues the questions that arise from them; for example: what effects does the rhetoric of the IT sector have on personality structure?

Such literary research is in no way new. Looking back through literary history, authors and works which can be subsumed under the heading can continually be found, such as for example Goethe, whose various activities as a natural scientist also manifest themselves in his novels (e.g. the discussion of chemistry in *Elective Affinities* of 1809), or the music stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann, who was also a composer and deliberately included specialist musical knowledge in his writing (e.g. in *Ritter Gluck* [1809], *Kreisleriana* [1810–14], and *Don Juan* [1813]). In addition, there are individual literary genres which almost by definition contain literary research, such as the historical novel, which always requires cultural-historical study, or of course science fiction, which at first mainly extrapolated existing transportation and communication technologies into the fantastic and which since the 1990s has increasingly also included contemporary biotechnologies.

However, a literary history primarily concerned with works of literary research does not (yet) exist, yet neither does an often-demanded historical, canonical work on artistic research as a discipline. Nevertheless, a greater number of literary and cultural studies publications on “the knowledge of literature” have been appearing recently, in

5 See, e.g.: Claude Sureau, *Alice au Pays des Clones* (2000); Tilo Ballien, *Die KlonFarm* (2000); Bernhard Kegel, *Sexy Sons* (2001); Eva Hoffman, *The Secret* (2001); Andreas Eschbach, *Perfect Copy: Die zweite Schöpfung* (2002); Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005); Michel Houellebecq, *La possibilité d'une île* (2005).

which the authors deal precisely with texts that come under the heading of literary research in the aforementioned sense.⁶ This literature provides information about mechanisms which represent central research themes for current literary and cultural studies: about the transfer of knowledge systems, and fantasies that go hand in hand with such transfers; about the literary integration of non-literary knowledge; and about opportunities for literature to intervene in other fields of knowledge.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH

In this book we are investigating the differences between art and artistic research; this requires a clear definition of a research practice that distinguishes artistic research from general art practice. Such a distinction must be sufficiently clear before artistic research can develop an enduring and independent character grounded in research.

I now propose to transfer the characteristics described with regard to literary research to artistic research and, in the process, modify them where necessary. In literary research, non-literary fields are key factors for the formulation of questions, as is also often the case with artistic research in the visual arts. In contrast, artistic research in the performing arts is still predominantly concerned with questions related to the art itself; thus in music, for example, it has so far been only musical processes that are investigated (e.g. instrument research, historical playing techniques, tone colors). The formulation of the respective research questions is partly also determined by the medium. Thus it may be obvious that as a linguistic medium literature can also deal with non-literary issues, whereas artistic research in music, for example, mainly investigates musical material. However, it is possible for all forms of art to be concerned with fields of knowledge which are not communicated artistically (artistic research in music can thus, for example, turn its attention to findings in musicology), and it is precisely this potential which I attempt to emphasize in the following proposal of definitions: an explicit concern with fields of knowledge which are not communicated

6 See, e.g.: “Interesse für bedingtes Wissen”: *Wechselbeziehungen zwischen den Wissenskulturen*, ed. Caroline Welsh and Stefan Willer (Munich, 2008); Jochen Hörisch, *Das Wissen der Literatur* (Munich, 2007); *fülle der combination: Literatur und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Bernhard Dotzler and Sigrid Weigel (Munich, 2005).

artistically is a constitutive component of artistic research. It promotes the transfer of knowledge and contributes to increasing the social relevance of artistic research. In accordance with this postulation artistic research displays the following parameters:

- Artistic research also studies fields of knowledge that are communicated non-artistically and makes their investigation clearly recognizable.
- “Non-artistically” means in the first instance that every conceivable field of knowledge can be included (physics, philosophy, genetic engineering, the rhetoric of legislation, etc.). However, “non-artistically” does not exclude the field of knowledge under investigation from being related to the respective art form; thus a photographer can study theoretical texts on photography or a composer musicological treatises on rhythm, such that this investigation is made explicit in the resulting artistic work.
- Artistic research presents the relevant knowledge that results from the investigation in an artistic way.
- Artistic research pursues a question clearly recognizable in the given work of art, and is, in addition, explicitly mentioned in paratexts. As a minimum, a linguistic presentation of the question is ensured with a paratext. Paratexts are, for example, information sheets in museums, concert and theater programs, book blurbs, etc. Paratexts give information about the development of a theme or about the contextualization in the field of the work of art.

These parameters provide an understanding of artistic research distinct from both art in general and scientific research: it is a question of the deliberate handling of an element of knowledge that can be clearly named and defined which is artistically reflected upon.

7 Henk Borgdorff emphasizes the danger of an isolation of artistic research and has on various occasions already called for an institutional approach to the academic discourse; see Borgdorff, “Artistic Research and Academia: an Uneasy Relationship,” in *Autonomi och egenart – konstnärlig forskning söker identitet* (Autonomy and Individuality – Artistic Research Seeks an Identity), Yearbook for Artistic Research 2008, Swedish Research Council, pp. 82–97: 87.

CONCERN WITH ACADEMIC CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE HUMANITIES

Admittedly such a definition cannot hide the fact that in some specific instances it remains unclear whether the case in point is artistic research or not. However, this set of features serves to characterize artistic research and thus make evident the areas it establishes, and in which it implements its findings and knowledge production. “Knowledge” is not a firmly established, stable item, but much more a stock of findings in flux, manifesting itself in various ways and changing depending upon the context. Thus it is particularly the transfer of knowledge from non-artistic fields into artistic contexts that is interesting here, as well as the new semantic fields that open up as a result.

Examples of such practices are nowadays examined in cultural, art, film, and literary studies. If the intention is to promote the theory and practice of artistic research and counteract its marginalization and isolation, an active and explicit concern with this academic-scientific research seems essential, as is the increased integration of artistic research itself in academic contexts through discussion in publications and substantive institutional cooperation. These developments could undoubtedly contribute to a positive development of theory in and honing of research practice, and thus, significantly, to tackling the “fundamental deficiency”⁷ diagnosed by Henk Borgdorff in the relationship between art and the university.