
EPILOGUE

Epilogical Thoughts

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Epilogue to MaHKUscript #3 Reclaiming Artistic Research.

In recent times, debates about artistic research have been inspired for the most part by methodological and institutional frameworks based on how the current structure of the academic bastion is organised. Consequently, the ontological question of the specificity of artistic research as a disciplinary field was posed again and again hoping to arrive at a monolithic approach acceptable to the academic world. That such a way of thinking about artistic research would include a reduction of both creative energy and artistic reflection seems to have been taken for granted by those involved because of their relentless academic craze.

This has made it all the more urgent to resituate the question of artistic research to where it belongs: in the practice of contemporary art. A first significant attempt to do so was made by the dOCUMENTA 13 (2012) team when curators Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Chus Martinez stated explicitly that artistic research should be understood as 'an advanced practice of doing art as a form of imaginative knowledge' occurring mostly beyond the boundaries of academic institutions. Thus, artistic research was put back on the right track, but ultimately it did not lead to the necessary reassessment of the concept – perhaps partly because of the large scale character of the dOCUMENTA 13 event. Conversely, it rather seems that the process of academization and the associated further institutionalization of artistic research has continued at high speed over the last years, at least in most contexts. The net result of this is that today more and more academically formatted and encapsulated programs for disciplinary artistic research are imposed on the creative practice.

The publication *Reclaiming Artistic Research – First Thoughts* emphasizes once more the necessity to question the consolidation of the field of artistic research from the position of the practice of art. With this purpose in mind, guest editor Lucy Cotter conducted a series of discussions with artists who, in their work, relate to that question in an engaged and articulated way. Starting point was the proposition of reclaiming an experimental dimension for devising and materializing progressive ideas that has been proper to art since time immemorial: an arena to relate, if possible in a contradictory sense, to the formalistic, the political, the intercultural, the philosophical, and the spiritual. In short, a domain that presents freedom to think both in a non-linear way and from scratch, but that is also capable indeed of continuously generating strategic connections between the aesthetic and the political through its own singular conditions and models.

No doubt, today's way of thinking in terms of research is not entirely new, but could specifically be understood as a continuation of how 20th-century conceptual art interpreted this domain as a place for reflection through the artistic process on critical, non-instrumentalized forms of documentable knowledge production: an artistic form of thought Hito Steyerl recently qualified as an 'aesthetics of resistance'. At stake here is a radical manner of resistance based on the intrinsic potential of art to imagine the world differently: a speculative and associative form of open-ended thinking that relates to the unknown, thus withdrawing from deterministic and causally inspired models of thought. In short, a form of thinking that cannot be caught in a static organisation of pre-formed categories. Therefore, research should be understood as a verb, and certainly not as a noun to be presented as a final product. This observation clearly underlines that artistic research should not be solidified within an academic architecture of distinctly defined inquiries, but rather – as contributions in this issue of MaHKUscript also affirm – remain linked to the dynamics of concerns and urgencies presented by artists.

Obviously, as Lucy Cotter's editorial to *Reclaiming Artistic Research* underscores, the discussions and artists' contributions do not intend to provide a well-defined canon. However, beyond that ontological impasse,

contours and profiles will come to the fore leading to a tentative territorialisation of the field. Therefore, thanks to its provisional quality, Artistic Research could be described as a transpositional framework: a non-disciplined space where an assemblage of creative practices, artistic thinking processes and curatorial strategies continually produce new sets of relationships that make idiosyncratic contributions to the articulation of urgent issues. Moreover, such a field of view will outline at the same time the methodological and epistemic preconditions: artistic research is characterised by an uninterrupted interaction and articulation of three inseparable and intrinsically interconnected lines: the line of creative practice, the line of artistic thinking, and the line of curatorial strategies. This dynamic form of connectivity is further elucidated in the discussion with Falke Pisano where the artist describes her research-based practice as a continuous cross-fertilization and blending of creative making, artistic thinking, and a performative approach to installative works.

Of course each artistic research practice has its own accents, or better put, its own way to approach the dynamics of the previously described assemblage with three interacting lines. Thus in the current debate about the creative commons, there is a distinct impetus for reclaiming the concept of creativity. A concept that because of its intrinsic quality of freedom seems hostage to the one-dimensional rhetoric of the protocol-oriented creative industry, while in fact it should stand for exploring the potentials of the sensible through art making. Starting from a renewed awareness of experimentality Artistic Research resists instrumental and pre-programmed use of creativity, and deconstructs, if necessary, the constant pressure of the current entrepreneurial society to perform. In line with this, Ryan Gander outlines that it is possible to act as a creative consultant for multinationals only when starting from uncompromising artistry.

A similar danger of reduction is present in the debate on knowledge production where the process of artistic thinking is almost completely subjugated to the – academic – regulations of cognitive capitalism. However, the dynamics of artistic thinking, which by definition precedes disciplinary knowledge, does not, because of its practices or differences, lead to transparent identities. These are the issues Liam Gillick brings up in the debate: in his view, the potential of artistic research lies in ‘thinking differently’ – a way of thinking that demonstrates how we can move from planning to speculation. For ultimately, in the artistic thinking process, it is all about articulating urgent – philosophical – issues in a non-philosophical way, as Sher Doruff also emphasizes in the discussion about ‘speculative fiction’.

These are urgent issues that ultimately need to be made public in a strategic way, and transformational spaces will need to be generated for them. Such is the perspective of the curatorial line that stands for generating experimental spaces for the public and performative modes of reflection and presentation, contextualizing connections between objects, images, discourses, locations, histories and especially futures. In particular this last aspect, re-thinking of and speculating about the future, has triggered today many research-based artists to revise the curatorial strategy of the archival display. Consequently, with the work *Sea (E) scapes*, Euridice Kala considers the archival as an imaginary space for reclaiming the subjectivity of the black people who had been reduced to commodities in the times of slavery. And also Samson Young describes his graphical notational system for mapping sound experiences as an archiving exercise that incites a different kind of imagination of political borders and conflict zones.

Although the main issue here obviously is imagining the world in a different way, and because of that future-orientation new modes of political imagination are implied, one should not equate the perspective of the curatorial line to political activism – just like the line of creativity should not be reduced to product innovation or the line of artistic thinking to pseudo-scientificity. Similarly, artistic research should not be a tool that can or may be deployed for a particular purpose. The specificity of artistic research – an activity that is entirely determined by vital encounters between creative practice, artistic thinking, and curatorial strategies – somehow remains unequivocally inserted in art while articulating questions and raising doubts, and, most of all, while creating novel, future-oriented, ideas.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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