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## EDITORIAL

# Experimentality

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In the current decade, the discussion on art seems to be increasingly dominated by a research-based and research-oriented discourse. What does this development mean for the concept of 'experiment' that, in the past century, has been so crucial for an ever-innovating art practice? Did the discourse on artistic research and its methodologies redefine our ideas regarding experiments and experimentality? Does current research generate new types of methodologies (such as affective or multi-sensory approaches) reassessing the nature of experimentation?

These questions formed the starting point for the first Research Pavilion<sup>1</sup> that took place in 2015 in the context of the Venice Biennale. For two months the pavilion accommodated a series of events such as an exhibition, discussions, screenings, interventions, seminars, and performative situations. The pavilion focused mainly on how the notion of experiment relates to the institutional space of the laboratory. Does the concept of 'laboratory' retain its sense in the context of artistic research? Could artistic research laboratories be seen as strategic, transdisciplinary platforms enabling research to be reimagined in new ways, i.e. by creating aesthetic preconditions for experimentation allowing topical problems to be addressed in some hybrid form?

In particular this last question is what Anita Seppä scrutinizes in her review of the Research Pavilion. In her view, an experimental attitude, or better put, an experimental mentality is characteristic of the imperative of the present: starting from the confrontation with the unknown searching for new realities, truths and futures leading to radically different and sometimes even enigmatic forms of knowledge.

Another question arises: Does an artistic research laboratory facilitate new connections between science, aesthetics and politics? It is precisely this question that Andrew Pickering further articulates in his essay. The way in which art understands the notion of experiment as a 'finding out' and a 'testing of boundaries' offers a challenging alternative for the restrictive interpretation used in science, namely that of 'well defined-parameters' and 'hypothesis-testing.' A wider implementation of the manner in which art sees experimentation implies the introduction of another epistemology, i.e. the introduction of a post-scientific worldview surpassing cognitive control and open to complexity and chaos, Pickering argues.

It was Hans-Ulrich Obrist who, in 1999, for the first time drew attention to the concept of the laboratory from the situation of art.<sup>2</sup> In a conversation, Obrist articulates the topical significance for visual art of the concepts of 'laboratory' and 'experiment' in a world largely dominated by the homogenizing forces of globalization. He also discusses 'Experiment Marathon,' a curatorial project produced by him where an experimental awareness is purposely made public, precisely to demand attention for different forms of thinking and knowledge production in the domain outside the laboratory.

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<sup>1</sup> 1st Research Pavilion – *Experimentality*, May 6–June 28, 2015, Sala del Camino, 621 Giudecca, Venice. Commissioner: Anita Seppä. Curators: Jan Kaila and Henk Slager. Participating artists: Tiong Ang & Alejandro Ramirez (The Netherlands), Magnus Bærtås (Sweden), Henna-Riikka Halonen (Finland), Dirk Hoyer (Estonia), Simo Kellokumpu (Finland), Matts Leiderstam (Sweden), Antti Nykyri (Finland), Maija Närhinen (Finland), Tuula Närhinen (Finland), Janis Rafa (Greece), Heli Rekula (Finland), and Hito Steyerl (Germany). Opening performance: Chicks on Speed. More information about the two-month laboratory program: <http://www.uniarts.fi/en/research-pavilion>

<sup>2</sup> The laboratory-based awareness, or more precisely, the awareness that the practice of art can be considered a laboratory without protocol, was expressed for the first time by the exhibition *Laboratorium* (Antwerp 1999), curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden. Cf. 'Laboratory Archive,' in: Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Olafur Eliasson, eds. *Experiment Marathon* (Reykjavik/London, 2009).

With the concept of 'making public' Obrist refers to Bruno Latour's thinking<sup>3</sup> which partly underlies the *Laboratorium* project: a thinking radically shifting focus from 'matters of fact' to 'matters of concern'. In the next decade, Latour would concretize his ideas about this further in the form of an experimental, multidisciplinary teaching laboratory SPEAP: Program of Experimentation in Art and Politics, Paris – developed together with Valerie Pihet who reports on SPEAP in her contribution – and the exhibition *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy* in ZKM, Karlsruhe addressing new modes of expression.

ZKM Director Peter Weibel contrasts the active concept of experiment with the passive, consumptive concept of observation. In his view, only experimentality – by means of its continuous stretching of perception in every distinct field, be it art, literature or science – is able to reveal the nature or, if you will, the truth of things and to procure progress.

Another experimental research institute is located in Zürich: the Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research. Artist Christina della Giustina worked here as 'artist in lab.' She reports on her project 'you are variations' converting eco-physiological data into musical compositions and sonic performative events where a tangible awareness of 'being with' can lead to new ways of creation, inclusion, and relating to ourselves and the (natural) environment.

Finally, this issue contains a number of contributions that are more or less in line with the strategy advocated by the above mentioned 'Research Pavilion' and, departing from a series of artistic practices, reflect further on the prerequisites for experimental exhibition-making and curatorial test scenarios. The project *Double Lives* developed by Natasha Ginwala for the 8th Berlin Biennial underscores that kind of reflection. Ginwala links the concept of 'experiment' to early machines of vision and the entanglements between the explorer-administrator during the expansion of the Empire and the 20th-century scientist. Subsequently, Marquard Smith takes the exhibition *The Global Archive* as his starting point and addresses the question of how today's artistic experiment could relate critically to hyper-topical global information ecologies by means of an archiving strategy in various curatorial media.

## Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of *Laboratorium*, the philosopher Bruno Latour – who realized the program component *The Theatre of Proof* for this project – argued that the modern myth of scientific, universally problem-solving reason has diminished considerably in our day and, therefore, increasingly more space will be demanded for research. Research, according to Latour, is uncertainty, whereas Science stands for certainty.

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