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Chapter 10

Ingredients for the Assessment of Artistic Research

Context

Neither this chapter nor the following contains annotations. They were written for the completion of the book. The present chapter serves as a springboard to the next, which will be a reconstruction and evaluation of the process of founding the *Journal for Artistic Research*. The ingredients for the assessment of artistic research have been compiled here from the preceding chapters, and will be put into operation and tested in the final chapter. Although I am aware that this is not an impartial undertaking, I still think it wise to refrain from mentioning here the more political and institutional issues involved.

In previous chapters I have examined artistic research from many different angles. It is now time to give a brief synopsis of the key issues I have discussed up to now. The present chapter will serve as a pivot between the topics dealt with so far (the theoretical framework) and the analysis to follow (the case study).

Résumé

In chapter 1, 'The Conflict of the Faculties', I provided an initial blueprint of my research domain, drawing on four different perspectives on the relationship between theory and practice in the arts. These were the instrumental, the interpretive, the immanent, and the performative perspectives. This culminated in three recommendations for the conduct of research in the arts, focusing on method, the type of outcome, and the form of the documentation.

My second chapter, 'The Debate on Research in the Arts', explored the background of the foundational debate on artistic research in the light of its institutional context and of philosophy of science. After discussing several terminological matters and research definitions, I raised the issue of the specific nature of research in the arts. This resulted in a preliminary determination of the conditions that art practice must meet in order to qualify as research.

In chapter 3, 'Artistic Research and Academia', I highlighted the fundamental tension between the artistic and the academic worlds and went on to argue for a broader conception of research and academia that allows for non-discursive knowledge forms and unconventional research methods. That chapter also provided a tentative characterisation of the non-conceptuality, the realism, and the contingency of artistic research.

In a critique of the standard model of research and development – and in debate with prevailing policy on science – I examined in chapter 4, 'Artistic Research within the Fields of Science', to what extent artistic research may be understood as a form of Mode 2 knowledge production. I emphasised here that artistic research is a research field that involves both the quest for fundamental understandings and the production of artefacts that have meaning in the art world, as well as the relationships between those two aims.

Chapter 5, 'Where Are We Today?', surveyed the current status of this emerging field and the gradual establishment of the new paradigm of artistic research within institutional frameworks. In the section on the epistemology of artistic research, I examined the goal of enhancing our experiential world in juxtaposition to the goal of advancing knowledge and understanding.

The hybrid nature of artistic research – attributable to its field of operation in two contexts: the world of art and the world of science – was the starting point of chapter 6, 'Artistic Research as Boundary Work'. Written more as a pamphlet, it expands the theme of artistic research to other life domains and to the role that artistic research might play there.

In chapter 7, 'The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research', I discussed similarities and contrasts with other fields of research in the humanities (aesthetics in particular), the social sciences, and the natural sciences and technology. The second part of the chapter drew on the premises set out in chapter 2 to address the question of whether artistic research can qualify as academic research. I concluded by elaborating in more detail on the characterisation of artistic research as non-conceptual, realistic, and contingent, which I introduced in chapter 3.

In the interview I have included as chapter 8, 'Boundary Work', I emphasised once again the open, unfinished nature of artistic research. An important observation here was that artistic facts are necessarily epistemologically vague – the very reason why they are productive.

In 'Artistic Practices and Epistemic Things' (chapter 9), I explored this epistemological incompleteness in more depth in a comparison with the theoretical work of the science historian Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. Artworks and art practices are 'epistemic things' par excellence that point towards what we do not yet know and that invite us to unfinished thinking.

Throughout the book, sometimes explicitly, sometimes more implicitly, I plead the case for the institutional recognition of research in the arts, to include both the awarding of academic degrees and the funding of artistic research.

In my concluding chapter, to follow this one, I will apply the insights I have accrued up to now in a specific case study: the creation and

development of the *Journal for Artistic Research* (JAR). The assessment of concrete artistic research in the context of JAR is at once the operationalisation and the touchstone of the claims I have made above. In JAR praxis, the theory of artistic research is verified or put to work, as it were. But prior to that case analysis I first need to gather together and regroup the ingredients we have examined so far that are pertinent to the assessment of art as research. My point of departure will be the tentative definition of research in the arts I have formulated in chapter 2:

Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes. Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. Research processes and outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research community and the wider public.

This definition was developed on the basis of an exploration of (1) what it means to do academic research and (2) what then the specific ontological, epistemological, and methodological characteristics of research in the arts are. In subsequent chapters, I refined, or in some cases broadened, that definition on certain points. In the present chapter I will again focus on the elements of this definition with specific reference to the assessment of art as research, also taking my elaborations into account. I will start from the issue raised in chapter 2 of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological status of art in the research – of *art as research*.

Towards evaluation criteria

In chapter 3 ('Artistic Research and Academia'), page 69, I already highlighted 'the intertwining of ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives – the circumstance that defining an object is always at once both an epistemic act and an indication of ways to gain

access to it'. The distinction I made between these perspectives in chapter 2 therefore served mainly a heuristic purpose: to focus the reader's attention on the particular aspects or perspectives that may play a role in research in the arts (cf. chapter 8).

The intertwinement of ontology, epistemology, and methodology is also manifest in the theoretical work of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (chapter 9). The diffuse ontological status of Rheinberger's epistemic things (which he called 'things' for good reason), their unfinished nature, is fundamental: epistemic things derive their very knowledge-generating power from the fact that they are indistinct, not yet fully crystallised. And whereas the one time these things are, in a methodological sense, *vehicles through which we can know*, the next time they are, in an ontological sense, *things we want to know*; and then another time they are, in an epistemological sense, *things that embody knowledge*. The phrase 'research in and through the arts' captures this intertwinement of perspectives: it is about the knowledge, understandings, experiences, and perspectives that are embodied in art objects and practices, and which manifest themselves through the praxis of the arts, the praxis of making and playing. In artistic research practice, art lets us know what it is and what perspective it offers.

I have also described the open nature of the 'object' of artistic research as 'boundary work' (chapters 6 and 8). From this viewpoint, too, artworks and art practices are polysemic and contingent. Depending on the context in which they are placed, they may manifest themselves as artefacts and actors in the network of the art world, the field of cultural production, or they may reveal themselves as epistemic things that generate insights in an academic context. The term 'boundary work' alludes to the negotiations that are continuously underway along the borderline between art and academia (and between art and other life domains), where the presumed stability of things is relinquished in favour of an open outlook on what is possible and what we do not yet know. This contingency of artistic research is inseparably bound up with the non-discursive and non-conceptual nature of its content (chapter 7). The object at issue partly eludes our epistemological grip. Even in the most abstract forms of art, the reality that unfolds in this artistic research (cf. chapter 9) is an articulation of the world we live in. With Rheinberger

in mind, I refer to this reality as the ‘artistic real’; in chapter 7 I call it the ‘realism’ of artistic research.

We may conclude from all this that artistic research is ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically an open undertaking, and that any assessment of whether a particular artistic practice qualifies as research must take this fundamentally open nature into account. No stable boundaries exist that delimit in advance what belongs to the domain of artistic research and what does not. There is always work to be done along the borderline of art and academia. But this does not mean that no criteria or guidelines can be formulated that may help in the assessment process.

Here again we are dealing with the issue of demarcation: the criteria we can set out, or the guidelines we can apply, to distinguish art-practice-as-research from art-practice-in-itself. One possible approach to this issue lies in the word ‘as’ in the phrase ‘art as research’. The classical distinction between artwork, art production, and art reception (which I discuss in chapter 1 in connection with research in the arts) and the heuristic distinction between object, process, and context (introduced in chapter 2) will be helpful here.

At the moment when art claims to be research in the emphatic sense (when artists assert that their artwork is also intended as research) – thereby making an epistemological claim – the art situates itself in academia. This inscribes the artwork, the concrete objects or practices, on the other side of the border separating art and academia. One can then justifiably ask what knowledge, what understanding, what insight, what experience this work embodies or attempts to put across. One may expect of the artist-researcher that she or he will substantiate this claim before the ‘academic forum of peers’.

The positioning of art *as* research is a purposive act. The production of the work, the artistic creative process, is carried out not only for the purpose of creating artefacts that can circulate in the art world, but also as a means of generating insights that contribute to what we know and understand about ourselves in the world, and which also further the development of the discipline in question (cf. chapter 4). In research in the arts, the insights and understandings are interwoven in the artistic material and are disclosed through the artistic creative process.

If the thus positioned art is perceived *as* research, the signifying context comes into play. Naturally this includes the context of the art world, the public reception of the art, and the cultural and historical environment, but it also includes academic discourse – the discourse in art history, philosophy of art, and other disciplines. The academic context is not, however, exclusively a context of justification. As we have seen, it is also a context of discovery and application. How an artwork has come into being and what meaning it has in the art world is academically relevant in the case of artistic research. In this way, art as research is embedded in social, artistic, and theoretical contexts with which it engages. The signifying context of artistic research also involves the work of others and the artistic and theoretical stances that work represents, and possibly also the artist's own prior work that has led up to the present work of art.

Thus, in the assessment of whether particular artistic practices qualify as research, the artworks themselves (the artistic objects and practices), their production (the creative artistic process), and their reception (the interpretive context) will all be weighed.

The definition of art as research that I formulated in chapter 2 and have quoted above can now serve as a template as we draw up criteria or guidelines that can aid in assessing whether artworks and art practices qualify as research. The elements in that definition have been the subject of separate discussions in chapter 7. These are the *intent* of artistic practice, the *originality* criterion, the contribution to *knowledge and understanding*, the *research question*, the *context* of the research, the *research methods*, and the *documentation and dissemination* of the findings. The broadened conception of what research is (addressed in particular in chapters 3 and 4) also informs the discussion of those separate elements, slightly refining or qualifying them at times. Those refinements or qualifications, which I will not recapitulate here, need to be considered in both the formulation and the application of the guidelines. The elements will nonetheless continue to serve as a sort of checklist, guiding us, as it were, to the questions we can and may ask of every artistic practice that claims to be research. In the case study in the next chapter, we will see if and how this translates into the editorial policies and the content of the *Journal for Artistic Research*. I will

now go into more detail about the elements of art as research and the questions we can derive from those elements.

The questions we may ask

The first element is the intent of artistic practice. At the moment an artistic practice claims to be research as well as art (in the emphatic sense of the word ‘research’), the artist in question affirms academic discourse; and that is no equivocal matter. All too often, artists claim to be doing research while at the same time opposing (for a variety of reasons) what academia stands for, or what they *think* it stands for. One aim of this book is to show that such resistance is unnecessary – no more than the opposition is justified, still pervasive within academia, to artistic practice that claims to be research. I have broadly described the forms of resistance and tried to refute them, particularly in chapters 3 and 4. The obvious, but also fundamental, question that needs to be posed as a guideline to any artistic research is: It is indeed *research*? An affirmative answer implies that the research engages with that which the academic world considers research, assuming that an enriched conception of ‘academic’ and ‘research’ is being used.

The second element is the criterion of originality and its corollary that the research must not lapse back behind what others have already done. There is not much to add to this observation. One should recall the distinction I have introduced in chapter 7 between artistic and academic originality. True artistic research is original both artistically and academically, in the sense that it gives us something we did not yet have – new knowledge about the world, about ourselves, or about the art form in question; a new perspective on what we thought we knew and understood; a new experience that makes us see, hear, perceive things differently. Or perhaps also a new form in which something can be cast or a new technique through which something can be addressed. At the same time, one must bear in mind that a researcher is often partly or entirely unaware of what is being sought at the time the research begins. This calls for a measure of caution when judging a research design or evaluating work in progress. The question that may be asked as a guideline is therefore: Does the research deliver or promise to deliver new insights, forms, techniques, or experiences?

On the third element – the contribution to knowledge and understanding – I have already expounded a great deal in previous chapters. It seems good to repeat here in different wordings that, with the emancipation of experiential knowledge (in the sense of tacit, non-conceptual knowledge that lies enclosed in bodily and sensory experience and in pre-reflective action), the experience of rational knowledge has been extended or supplemented by experiences of embodied forms of knowledge (including aesthetic experiences), and that these are now coming back to claim their epistemological status, two centuries and a half after Baumgarten. A fully developed notion of academia will reincorporate these forms of knowing and knowledge within its walls. In the preceding chapters, from the first onwards, I have left open the question of whether the production of knowledge, understanding, and experience should be examined from a hermeneutic or a constructivist point of view. Do we discover what exists, or does what we discover exist? Here, again, I must leave this question open, although the identified intertwinement of ontology and epistemology would seem to dissolve this very antithesis. In previous chapters I have repeatedly (with reference to Latour) called attention to this with the annotation ‘constructivist realism’. What is important here, however, is the question we can use as a guideline in assessing the art as research: What knowledge, what understanding, and what experience is being tapped, evoked, or conveyed by the research?

The fourth element is the research question, the subject or object of the research, the issue addressed in the research study. Keeping in mind the refinements I have made in chapter 7, but leaving these aside for the moment, one might, with respect to this element, expect every researcher to present the study in a way that makes clear to the assessor that something is at stake here, that something of interest is being mooted or that a particular development is to be furthered. The form this presentation takes may vary; it does not always have to include a closely defined research question or well-constructed hypothesis. The artistic-academic forum may also be addressed with a non-linguistic exposition of the subject that employs other forms of discursivity to pose the ‘question’. Just as for the other elements, a criterion of persuasiveness pertains here: Is the description or exposition of the topic,

issue or question sufficiently lucid to make clear to the forum what the research is about?

The fifth element involves the context of the research. As has often been pointed out, one characteristic of research in the arts is its dual context – that of the art world and that of academia. Much artistic research is also transdisciplinary, in the sense that it links the art to other domains (academic or non-academic). Moreover, the contexts of discovery, justification, and application are interwoven in artistic research practice. In assessing art as research, one can inquire about these contexts: What relationship does the research have to the artistic or the social world, to theoretical discourse, and to the contributions that others are making or have made on this subject?

The sixth element is the research method. Artistic research can take on widely divergent forms. Depending on the topic, the contexts, the aim, and the scope of the research, the artist can also employ research methods and techniques derived from other fields of endeavour, including science. This methodological pluralism is still coupled, however, with the requirement that the research must take place in and through artistic practice. The implication is that the artist will often be actively engaged in the research process. Experimentation, participation, interpretation, and analysis are thereby intertwined in the research. In assessing the research, one should judge how well-suited the chosen methods are to addressing the research question: Does this experiment, participation, interpretation, or analysis provide answers to the question posed and, by so doing, does it contribute to what we know, understand, and experience?

The seventh element involves documenting and disseminating the research results. In some part, the outcomes of artistic research are artworks or artistic practices, including images, compositions, designs, installations, choreographies, productions, or performances, but also more abstract artistic products such as concepts, interventions, or processes. The documentation provided with these research findings will need to show respect for the ways in which artists document, expose, and publish their work, that is, respect for how the art is conveyed. The documentation of artistic research is not the same, however, as the documentation of artistic work. It additionally requires discursive elab-

oration, in which, of course, artistic material can be used. As explained in chapter 7, the discursive documentation may be devoted to a reconstruction of the research process, to an interpretation of the 'material' research outcome, or to a discursive approximation of or allusion to the artistic work. The documentation may also be expected to conform to what the academic world considers responsible publication; if provided in text form, for example, that might include conventions relating to the structure and reasoning of the argumentation, to references, to quotations, and to style. In view of the intertwinement of the artistic and the academic in the research, however, this is not an iron-clad rule; but artist-researchers who decide to deviate from the guideline may well be expected to demonstrate through artistic or traditional means why they have done so. The question that can be asked in assessing the artistic research is therefore: Does the nature and design of the documentation support the dissemination of the research in and outside academia?

To recapitulate, here are the seven questions again that can and may be asked in the assessment of a particular artwork or practice as research:

1. It is indeed *research*?
2. Does the research deliver or promise to deliver new insights, forms, techniques, or experiences?
3. What knowledge, what understanding, and what experience is being tapped, evoked, or conveyed by the research?
4. Is the description or exposition of the topic, issue, or question sufficiently lucid to make clear to the forum what the research is about?
5. What relationship does the research have to the artistic or the social world, to theoretical discourse, and to the contributions that others are making or have made on this subject?
6. Does this experiment, participation, interpretation, or analysis provide answers to the question posed and, by so doing, does it contribute to what we know, understand, and experience?
7. Does the type and design of the documentation support the dissemination of the research in and outside academia?

Together with the criterion that artistic research takes place in and through the practice of art and that the outcome of the research is also art, we can now put these questions to work as a kind of assessment framework for the case study on the *Journal for Artistic Research*.