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Chapter II

The Case of the Journal for Artistic Research

Or how a new field of
research is articulated

We are allowed to speak interestingly by what we allow to speak interestingly.

We have taken science for realist painting, imagining that it made an exact copy of the world. The sciences do something else entirely – paintings too, for that matter. Through successive stages they link us to an aligned, transformed, constructed world.

Bruno Latour*

* Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 78, 144.

Context

This chapter describes an undertaking in which many people are involved, yet it is written from one participant's point of view. It is important to remember that the *JAR* editorial board members, the colleagues from the Society for Artistic Research, and partners from the Artistic Research Catalogue project have all made their contributions to the creation as well as to the conceptual and material design of the journal.

This is also a chapter in which, occasionally, I employ the insights provided by Bruno Latour's sociology of science. One such insight involves the nullification of the antithesis between theory and practice. *JAR* is the realisation of an idea, the articulation of a proposition. Theory and practice are inseparably tied together in *JAR*. This constructivist realism enables me to partially answer the question I raised at the beginning of chapter 1 about the relationship between theory and practice.

This is a story about the creation and workings of a new peer-reviewed journal in a new field of research. Or better, it is a story about how people, institutions, works of art, and discursive practices meet to form a heterogeneous network – a network in which the new field of research is performed, enacted, and made real. And it is a story about how software development, funding arrangements, legislation, and review procedures and criteria transact and interact, thereby transforming the network actants (both human and non-human), while at the same time providing the artistic research network with temporary material, strategic and discursive stability, and durability.

By choosing these words to report on the *Journal for Artistic Research* (JAR), I reveal the influence that actor-network theory (ANT) – an influential variant within science and technology studies (STS) – has had on my work. Any narrative told against the backdrop of a theoretical framework will serve to sustain that framework (or perhaps to undermine it). It is not my intention, though, to prove that ANT is right, nor to modify or enhance it. In my choice of words, my angle of approach, or the ways I tie things together, I will employ ANT ‘loosely’, like a bricoleur – an image that STS, as it happens, sometimes makes positive use of.

I am thereby taking up the advice recently given by Helga Nowotny, president of the European Research Council, to researchers in the arts:

STS has unravelled many heterogeneous networks that extend throughout society and among its actors and institutions. In these heterogeneous networks, ‘humans’ and ‘things’, i.e. artefacts, are linked in multiple and mutual relationships. By extending the concept of ‘agency’, ANT or actor-network theory claims that the production of new knowledge is taking place in numerous sites and through many transactions and transformations that extend throughout society and its institutions without losing sight of the ‘objects’ and their materiality. From an ANT perspective, humans and the artistic phenomena they produce and interact with, can also be seen as constituting continuously reconfigured assemblages. Researchers in the arts are therefore

well advised – and invited – to delve into the burgeoning STS literature. There they will find much that appeals to them intuitively, but also much that allows them to ‘make sense’ of their own artistic practices.¹

JAR, RC, SAR

The *Journal for Artistic Research*² is an enhanced, open-access, international peer-reviewed journal for the identification, dissemination, and discussion of artistic research, its methodologies and outcomes, in all the disciplines of art. Issue 0 of *JAR* was launched at a conference in Bern in Switzerland on 4 March 2011. The contributions to that inaugural issue were invited by the editorial board and were not peer-reviewed. As I wrote the present report, the peer-reviewed issue number 1 was in the making and was to be published in November 2011.

My account will not directly examine the individual *JAR* contributions. The assessment of those contributions was, and is, in the hands of peer reviewers, and it is not my task to do their work over again. Central to my analysis in this short history of *JAR* is the way that assessments are carried out, what ‘peer review’ means in the context of *JAR*, and what considerations were involved in formulating the peer review guidelines.

JAR is the material and conceptual outcome of a process – the artistic research field in action (to paraphrase Bruno Latour). To understand how *JAR* came about and what was mobilised to achieve it, we must go back to the autumn of 2009, to Solstrand, on the Norwegian west coast near Bergen. Here – at a crucial developmental moment in the new field of research – people, instruments, institutions, and ideas all played their part in creating and articulating a network, and at the same time transforming its constituents into allies in an exciting, challenging new endeavour.

1. Helga Nowotny, ‘Foreword’, in Michael A.R. Biggs and Hendrik Karlsson (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. xxii.

2. See *JAR* n.d. <www.jar-online.net>. Some formulations in this chapter are drawn from the wordings used on the *JAR* website.

For six successive years, the Bergen National Academy of the Arts, with support from the Research Council of Norway, organised conferences entitled *Sensuous Knowledge in Solstrand*.³ The title explicitly refers to Alexander G. Baumgarten, retrospectively regarded by one of the conference initiators, Professor Søren Kjølrup of Bergen and of Roskilde University in Denmark, as an originator of the new research paradigm. Kjølrup's ideas were later published as *Another Way of Knowing*, the first in a book series also entitled *Sensuous Knowledge*, published by the project at Bergen Kunsthøgskolen.⁴

The sixth and final conference at Solstrand (SK6) was held from 23 to 25 September 2009. The formula was similar to that of previous meetings: the focus was on the presentation of concrete artistic research in small-scale workshops with plenty of discussion. The SK conferences were not the only ones of their kind. Several other conference series had been held in the past decade that likewise focused on the new research field. These included the Research into Practice (R2P) conferences (every other year from 2000 to 2008), convened by the University of Hertfordshire; and the Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) conferences in 2001, 2003, and 2005, organised by the University of Bristol, both with support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom.⁵ Two Dutch initiatives should also not go unmentioned: the symposium entitled 'Artistic Research', organised by the Global Vernunft Foundation, in Amsterdam's Maison Descartes (11-12 April 2003); and the expert meeting entitled 'Kunst als Onderzoek', held a year later in Amsterdam's Felix Meritis centre (6 February 2004) on the initiative of the Art Theory and Research Group at the Amsterdam School of the Arts.

The SK6 conference in Norway was also the scene of a renewed encounter between three people of varied backgrounds that were to play a critical role in the development of *JAR*. They were Florian Dombois, an artist and geophysicist who at the time headed the Y Institute for Transdisciplinarity at the Bern University of the Arts; Michael Schwab,

3. See SK n.d. <<http://sensuousknowledge.org/>>.

4. See Kjølrup 2006.

5. See R2P n.d.; PARIP n.d.

artist and philosopher, lecturer at the Royal College of Art, London; and myself, Henk Borgdorff, who specialises in research in the arts at the University of the Arts, The Hague, and the University of Gothenburg, and who, in writing the present report, is privileged to serve as a kind of participant ethnographer.

From autumn of 2008 on, Michael Schwab had been receiving support from Florian Dombois to work at the Bern University of the Arts on developing an online journal for the publication of artistic research. I had met Dombois earlier at a lecture I gave in Berlin in October 2005, as well as at a seminar I held in Zurich in December 2006. All three of us were working to conceptually clarify the phenomenon of artistic research, had occasionally communicated by e-mail, and had been intending to speak more extensively at some point.

In 2008, Dombois, Schwab, and I had been invited to contribute to a conference at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), held under the auspices of the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA), the network organisation for arts education in Europe. The theme of the conference was the distinction between art and artistic research, an issue of demarcation that had been surfacing again and again in the international debate.⁶ During that conference in Zurich on 23-24 April 2009, a lively debate arose in the corridors about artistic research, and in particular about the ways it should be documented. Around that same time, Schwab had drafted a 'call for support' for the creation of a journal, and from June 2009 onwards the three protagonists were in intensive contact about the proposed journal and about who and what would be needed to make it happen.⁷

This 'who and what' came together in a productive way at the Norway conference in the autumn of 2009. One part of the development plan for the journal was the design of a digital database for the

6. The proceedings of the conference were published as Caduff et al., 2009.

7. We were all three heavily interested in the theoretical and political rationale of artistic research. Beyond this, Dombois brought his managerial and his financial expertise to the project, while Schwab concentrated more on the conceptual framework. I was happy to contribute, too, with my growing network in the artistic research field. It is not always easy to distinguish between the voices of Dombois, Schwab, and myself when reporting on the development of *JAR*.

documentation and ‘exposition’ of artistic research. The *Journal for Artistic Research* was to be an enhanced publication that would store and give integrated access to images, audio files, and videos as well as texts. An essential requirement was that the artistic research was to be displayed in ways that would fulfil artists’ expectations. Clearly, new software had to be developed for that purpose, as the existing repositories did not meet the requirements we had set for the future platform.⁸ The envisaged database was seen as the mainstay of the journal. Two months previously, in July 2009, Schwab and I had conceived the idea of creating a strategic separation between the development of the Research Catalogue (RC), as the digital database was called in the plans, and the proposed journal. For the RC, I saw opportunities to apply for financial support from the international Regional Attention and Action for Knowledge Circulation (RAAK) programme operated by the Stichting Innovatie Alliantie (SIA) of the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

There were also content-based reasons to set the RC apart from the journal, reasons that were intrinsic to the nature of the two initiatives. *JAR* had been conceived as a peer-reviewed academic periodical for artistic research. In the art world, among artists and curators, a good many reservations existed (and still exist) towards ‘artistic research’, and definitely towards academia. To build bridges between the worlds of art and academia is one of the very purposes of the entire project of *JAR* and RC. Or more precisely, once artistic research is introduced into the art world and into academia, the latter two domains might not only find more common ground, but might even alter slightly in character. Notions of what the art world is, and what the academic world is, could be broadened and enriched by the emergence of the new field of research. The network surrounding *JAR* could make significant contributions to that transformation, as well as to the stability and durability of the research field.⁹ The RC is

8. It was Michael Schwab who developed the idea and the conceptual and material framework of the Research Catalogue.

9. *JAR* does not stand alone. Other journals that focus on the field of artistic research are *Art and Research*, *Inflexions*, *Studies in Material Thinking*, *МАHKУzine*, and *Art Monitor*. Mostly they do not publish artistic research work itself, but critical reflections on it. Published conference proceedings, such as the *Working Papers in Art and Design*, are also available.

a material actor here, an ‘immutable mobile’ (Latour), that ensures stability, mobility, and combinability in the new field.

This Research Catalogue (RC), then, is inclusive, bottom-up, and open-ended. That is to say, in principle any person can gain access to the database to document or expose their work; it is a resource or tool for self-publishing; and there are no other restrictions other than those attached to the use of the software. Artists (or anyone else) can make use of this platform to provide access to and disseminate their work, without first having the work assessed by others. In *JAR*, by contrast, assessment by others is crucial. But who are those ‘others’? And what criteria do they apply in their assessments? These were issues to be addressed later in the journal’s editorial policy.

The database is searchable at various levels – from keywords to documented work. Artworks and art practices that are documented as part of an RC exposition can be located and cited by others. By publishing their work in the RC, artists not only document it, but they also establish links to the growing community of artist-researchers worldwide who are committed to communicating their work as research. The RC provides a platform for artistic research. Documentation and publication of work in that context implies that it is also intended as research, and that it can be ‘read’ as such without someone first having to determine where the lines of demarcation are. This makes the RC an interesting instrument for the emergent research field. It is this very absence of previously defined boundaries that will enable the new research field to develop.

In Solstrand, the *JAR* network took further shape. The application for Dutch developmental funding for the Research Catalogue was a topic of discussion. For the application to succeed, it was important to have sufficient support from the field itself. The president of ELIA pledged support via his network organisation. The initiative would later be presented at the ELIA biennial conference in Nantes in October 2010. Support was also garnered during the Norway conference from two other network organisations, the SLSAeu (the European section of the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts) and the AEC (European Association of Conservatoires). They, too, enabled *JAR* and the RC to be introduced at respective conferences in Riga (June 2010) and Warsaw (November 2010).

After Norway, the organisers continued to work intensively in late 2009 on creating a network of artists, arts institutions, arts schools, universities, and research centres which, with support from the Dutch funding body, would begin building the RC. The application for a two-year grant was approved in January 2010, and the project was launched on 1 March 2010 with financial support of more than 400,000 euros. It bore the name Artistic Research Catalogue and operated from The Hague.

In the course of the project, it became clear that the distinction between ‘work’ and ‘exposition’ would be crucial for the RC (and for *JAR*).¹⁰ In every academic research publication, the work that is done in the context of discovery or that is critically scrutinised (in the laboratory, in the field, at the researcher’s desk) is ‘exposed’ in ways that both fulfil the standards of scholarly dissemination and involve a transformation (Latour) of the content. Whether the work concerns empirical data collection, ethnographic field research, historiography, or technical design, the research topic is always transformed and modelled into an object of knowledge and is made to speak through academic publication. In this way, objects of proto-knowledge – indistinct things and situations – acquire tentative ontological and epistemological forms (cf. chapter 9).

The same applies to research in the arts. What first belongs to the art world (and has its own place there) is transformed in the context of

Ultimately, the following partner institutions were to participate in developing the Research Catalogue:

- University of the Arts, The Hague, Department of Research in the Arts
- Zuyd University, Research Centre on Autonomy and the Public Sphere in the Arts, Maastricht
- Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Research Group on Art and Public Space, Amsterdam
- Utrecht School of the Arts, Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design (maHKU), Utrecht
- De Theaterschool, Amsterdam
- Master of Choreography, Amsterdam
- Leiden University, Academy for Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden
- Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven
- Basis voor Actuele Kunst (BAK), Utrecht
- Het Huis van Bourgondië, Maastricht
- V2_ Institute for the Unstable Media, Rotterdam
- Royal College of Art, Curating Contemporary Art, London
- Bern University of the Arts, Y Institute for Transdisciplinarity, Bern
- Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin
- Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, Project GAMMA, Karlsruhe
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Program in Art, Culture and Technology (ACT), Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Journal for Artistic Research (*JAR*), hosted at Bern University of the Arts, Bern
- Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Department of Research and Development, Brussels
- European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA)
- European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)
- European Society for Literature, Science and the Arts (SLSAeu)

10. This was also the theme of a working conference of the Artistic Research Catalogue project in December 2010 in Gothenburg. Michael Schwab deserves credit for coining the term ‘exposition’ as described here.

academic discourse into a conveyor of, or embodiment of, knowledge and understanding. This makes artworks into ‘boundary objects’ – hybrid objects or practices whose status varies according to the context in which they appear. In the view of the RC, ‘works’ are not just documented, but exposed. That is, in the RC one may ‘stage, perform, curate, translate, unfold or reflect practice as research’.¹¹

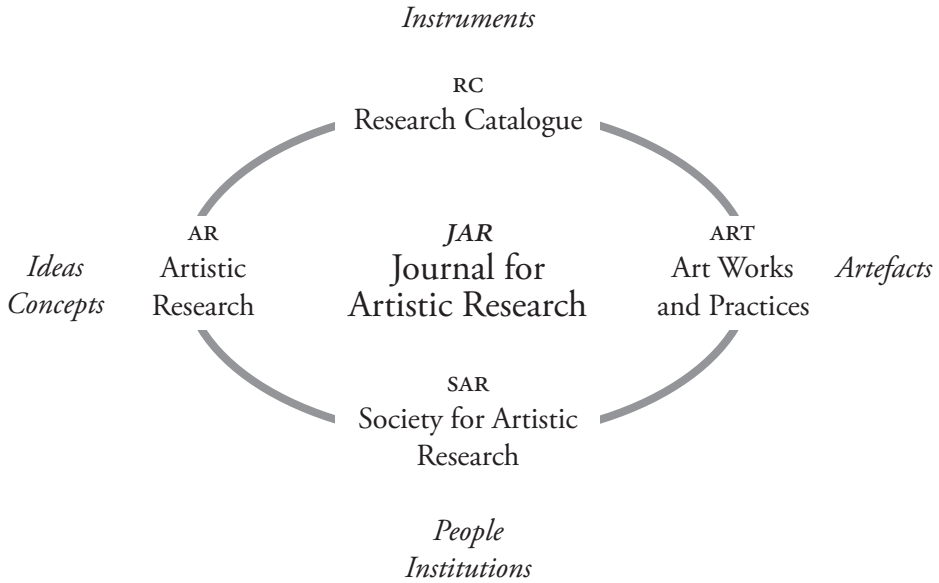
The *Journal for Artistic Research* – built as a portal on the Research Catalogue – is an online, open-access periodical. It has no subscribers, and anyone can consult the journal at any time. It hence has no subscription income either. The call for support that went out through many channels on 23 November 2009 was partly intended to garner support from people and institutions that were willing to provide material support to the project. In the early months of 2010, it became increasingly clear that a legal entity would need to be created. Innumerable people worldwide – artists, academics, and others – had declared their support, and a growing number of institutions had expressed willingness to assist *JAR* financially. The launch of *JAR* and RC in March 2010 therefore coincided with the establishment of the Society for Artistic Research (SAR). Its mission is

to display and document work in a manner that respects the artist’s modes of presentation while fulfilling the expectations of scholarly dissemination, and to re-negotiate the relationship of art to academia, and the role and function of research in artistic practice.¹²

At this writing, more than thirty institutions worldwide (chiefly universities and academies of the arts, but also national research institutes) support the Society. This has fostered a closely knit but dynamic network of relations between ideas, concepts, instruments, artefacts, people, and institutions surrounding the proposed journal. Since March 2010, work on the Research Catalogue has been in progress,

11. Michael Schwab, ‘Editorial’, *Journal for Artistic Research*, 0 <<http://www.jar-online.net/index.php/issues/editorial/480>>.

12. See the *JAR* webpages for information about the Society for Artistic Research.



parallel to preparations for the initial (trial) issue of *JAR* and for building the Society. Artists and curators collaborated (both independently and via their institutions and art schools) in the Artistic Research Catalogue project with academics and software developers. Their guiding question was:

What kind of instrument for the documentation, dissemination and discursive signification of artistic research projects can meet the interests of professional artists, art institutes and art students engaged with forms of art practice as research? And how to build an instrument, which, at the same time, is inclusive towards the specific needs and demands that originate from the different art disciplines?

The project description further elucidates this as follows:

[RC] positions itself between art practice and academia, between the world of art and higher arts education. Artistic research occupies a discursive field linking extensive documentations of both

research and art work with expositions and comments that engage with the signification of the work as research. Adding work to this catalogue makes a claim that the work can be seen as research; through expositions, comments and articles the initial claim is transformed into an argument. Finding a suitable structure in which to develop the relationship between documentation and exposition plays a difficult but important part in artistic research.¹³

Feedback from established and trainee artists and from academics led to recommendations and software adaptations. Practical and conceptual issues were discussed in workshops and conferences in Leiden, Gothenburg, Bern, and Zurich. A first version of the software was released in March 2011, after which artists ‘from outside’ were able to access the RC and use it to document their artistic research work. By August 2011, about 125 artist-researchers worldwide were actively using the RC. In November 2011, a new release of the software was launched, which was more user-friendly and offered possibilities for pre-publication collaboration, extended forms of commenting, and the publication of review reports.

Because *JAR* is a peer-reviewed academic journal, submitted contributions are subjected to the critical scrutiny of external reviewers who are considered experts on research in the arts or specific areas within it – research, that is, in which artworks or art practices constitute the heart of the research from a methodological and epistemological point of view. *JAR*’s policy is to carefully seek out, for each contribution, the expertise appropriate to the topic in question. For every submission, at least three reviewers are requested to write evaluation reports, guided by a standard peer review form (another ‘immutable mobile’ in the *JAR* network).¹⁴ Because the artistic and the academic are interwoven when art is exposed as research, both artists and academics

13. These are extracts from the project application, which is unpublished. See ARP 2010 <<http://innovatie-alliantie.nl/projectenbank/raak-project/724-artistic-research.html>> and ARC 2010 <<http://www.kabk.nl/pageEN.php?id=0485>> for more information about the Artistic Research Catalogue project.

14. The peer review guidelines can be accessed through the *JAR* website.

will normally take part in every assessment. This type of extended peer review is increasingly common outside the arts domain as well.¹⁵ In the field of artistic research, the ‘community of peers’ is still in development. The creation of *JAR* is a significant step in that process.¹⁶

JAR currently uses a single-blind review process, with open-review publication. During the review process, the reviewers are anonymous; the artists/authors are not. In the field of art, a double-blind review process would be unrealistic, as artworks often carry the ‘signature’ of the artist who created them. When a submission is accepted for publication in *JAR*, we publish the review reports, edited by the reviewers. The reviewers have the option to publish their names with the report or to stay anonymous. Most reviewers opt to make public both the review report and their identity. The ambition of *JAR* is that not only the editors, but also the reviewers engage with the submitted material without relinquishing the ‘external scrutiny’. Open dialogue is vitally important in the emerging field of artistic research. In future, *JAR* will therefore seek to facilitate open-process collaboration and commentary through the Research Catalogue platform. A further ambition is to include real-life events (such as exhibitions or performances) in the assessments. A working group in the Society for Artistic Research is currently studying that possibility, but it is still uncertain whether the limited confines of the online journal would allow for that.

The criteria or guidelines for the assessment of *JAR* submissions focus on three main issues. First – and the order of the criteria is not without import – an exposition should be able to effectively impact upon, and artistically and intellectually engage, a targeted audience. Second, peer reviewers are to judge whether the contribution exposes art as research. The third, more specific requirement is that the artistic and

15. Cf. Gibbons et al. 1994.

16. Building a community of peers is likewise one objective of the SHARE academic network. SHARE (Step-Change for Higher Arts Research Education) is a project supported by the European Commission in which thirty-five graduate schools and other institutions involved in third-cycle research in the arts in twenty-six European countries work together. The project runs from October 2010 to October 2013 and is coordinated by ELIA and the Graduate School of Creative Arts and Media (GradCAM) in Dublin. See SHARE n.d. <<http://www.sharenetwork.eu/>>.

intellectual proposition underlying a contribution should be supported by the design of the exposition and the mode of navigation through it.

The peer review form additionally requires reviewer self-assessment. Could a conflict of interest exist? What expertise does the reviewer have and what weight does the reviewer attach to that expertise in relation to the subject of the submission? A further question is whether there are possible ethical or legal issues that need to be allowed for in the assessment. Finally, each reviewer is asked to provide feedback to *JAR* to help improve the review process. As the review form makes clear, the *JAR* editorial board is aware of the limitations and pitfalls of any review process, especially anonymous ones. An annexe therefore provides some 'notes on constructive reviewing'. In my discussion of the peer review guidelines that will now follow, I shall confine myself to the three main criteria.

Artistic and intellectual interest

This is what the guidelines for reviewers say about the first criterion:

Is the exposition of artistic/intellectual interest? Although difficult to assess, expositions are sought that endeavour to address important artistic issues or intellectual problems in a specifically artistic manner and which engage others in the field. Please tell us whether or not the submission is interesting in its subject, methods or outcomes.

Interestingly, few differences of opinion emerged about this criterion. In the discourse surrounding *JAR*, everyone agreed that the contributions should be artistically and intellectually interesting or challenging. Within this criterion, the emphasis lies on the artistic manner in which the issues and problems are approached. This is the quality through which *JAR* distinguishes itself from other academic platforms that publish on art. Following the publication of issue 0, this was a topic of some concern. One member of the Society's executive board wrote, for example,

I am concerned about the quality of *JAR* contributions. I had real trouble with [title omitted]: to be honest, I found it neither

artistically nor intellectually satisfying. [...] Forgive me this directness, and it is not against anybody. Last year we came really, really far, but I see quite a way to go before issue 1. I see *JAR* not as a PhD publication journal, but as an international professional journal of the highest calibre that sets the pace for artistic research, challenging both the art market and academia.¹⁷

By stressing professionalism and by referring to the art market, the writer makes clear that his prime focus is on artistic quality. If *JAR* is not artistically convincing, it is doomed to fail. Many, if not all, commentators were convinced of that. It is therefore literally the first and foremost criterion.

For *JAR* 1 and subsequent issues, an extensive pool of available reviewers has been created. An important objective was to ensure a sufficient range of expertise. In the *JAR* context, 'extended peer review' means that both the artists' perspective and the academic perspective have to be represented. The number of artists worldwide who now occupy academic posts or hold academic doctorates is considerable, especially in the anglophone world and in Scandinavia. Their number is also clearly increasing on the European continent and in parts of Asia and South America. But the idea was also to call on the expertise of artists who are rather further away from academia, who are unfamiliar with academic mores, or who have reservations about academic culture and practice. In addition, it was necessary to mobilise both specialist knowledge from the various disciplines of art as well as generalist methodological knowledge.

Artistic research is a relatively new research field, and *JAR*, by virtue of its exceptional format, constitutes a singular and challenging platform within that field. *JAR* is challenging not only to the artist-authors, who have to work with a beta version of the RC editor that is none too user-friendly as of yet, but also to the reviewers. Some familiarity with artistic research, or at least a willingness to engage with it, is essential.

JAR is inclusive, also in terms of the divergent views that exist with respect to artistic research. Roughly speaking, one can discern three

17. From private email correspondence.

such points of view: (1) the academic perspective, (2) the sui generis perspective, and (3) the critical perspective.

1. The academic perspective – associated by some with how the new research paradigm is institutionalised in the English-speaking world, notably in the UK – puts value on traditional academic criteria when it comes to differentiating art practice as research from art practice in itself.
2. The sui generis perspective – associated by some with how artistic research made its entry into academia in the Nordic countries – foregrounds artistic values when it comes to assessing research in the arts.
3. The critical perspective – associated by some with how one is struggling with the Bologna imperatives in the German-speaking countries – emphasises the critical, or even subversive, force that research in the arts might exercise in opposition to the neo-liberal tendency in our post-Fordist knowledge economy to subsume everything deviant under a single umbrella.

All these considerations have been taken into account in putting together the pool of reviewers and referring submissions to them.¹⁸

Art as research

The second guideline for reviewers invites them to judge whether the contribution exposes art as research. Affirming this implies that the contribution addresses (though it does not necessarily conform to) the prevailing academic standards for the conduct of research. Clearly this criterion (or perhaps ‘guideline’, as some participants had misgivings about the term ‘criterion’) constituted one of the most challenging topics in the discourse. The discourse has been pursued, among other places, since July 2010 on the online forum operated by *JAR*¹⁹ and in March 2011 at the meeting in

18. The twelve submissions that went into peer review for *JAR 1* were eventually judged by forty external experts. One submission was accepted in the first round, needing only small changes. Most submissions were sent back for modification or improvement on the basis of the reviews. Ultimately, *JAR 1* appeared in November 2011 with eight expositions and twenty-six published review reports.

19. See <<http://www.jar-online.net/blog/category/peer-review/>> [accessed 7 January 2012].

Bern that launched *JAR* O. Naturally it has been a topic of continual discussion in the *JAR* editorial board, as well as online and during face-to-face or Skype conferences. This is what the peer review form as of August 2011 asks of the reviewers with the respect to the second criterion:

Does the submission expose practice as research? In the Research Catalogue, practice is exposed, translated, transformed, performed, curated etc. as research. The claim to be research implies a relationship in one way or another to academic criteria for the conduct of research. The submission need not comply with all (or even one) of the points listed here. But one might question whether it does, and if not, what the artistic, aesthetic or intellectual rationale is.

Please take into account:

- whether or not the submission contains a description or exposition of the question, issue or problem the research is exploring, and if not, if such an omission matters;
- whether or not the submission shows evidence of innovation in content, form or technique in relation to a genre of practice;
- whether or not the research issue is contextualised, which may include social, artistic, and/or theoretical issues that the work responds to, a discussion of a range of positions taken by other artists to whom this work contributes a particular perspective, and some documentation of work by the artist that led to the present submission, and if not, if such an omission matters;
- whether or not the submission provides new knowledge, interpretation, insights or experiences, and what (kind of) new knowledge, interpretation, insights or experiences these comprise;
- the adequacy and soundness of the methods used and the thoroughness of research, analysis, and/or experiment.

In the light of this criterion (or better, these criteria), the task is now to examine whether they are consistent with the ‘assessment framework’ proposed in the previous chapter. Here, again, are the seven elements of that framework:

1. intent
2. originality
3. enhancement of knowledge
4. research question
5. contextualisation
6. methodology
7. documentation and dissemination

The first element, intent, involves not so much whether art is research, but whether a particular artistic practice is *intended* as research. At the point where an artist exposes her work in *JAR* or in the RC, she inscribes that work, as it were, into the research discourse. By so doing, she asserts that the work is also to be regarded as research. In the context of the peer-reviewed journal, such a claim is subject to intersubjective evaluation. And something exceptional occurs here, in an epistemological and an ontological sense. The work exposed in the Research Catalogue ‘transforms’ (Latour) from an artistic product to an artistic argument, to a potential bearer of knowledge and understanding. At this moment, artworks and art practices explicitly become epistemic things (Rheinberger), exposed as research in order to set our thinking into motion.

The intent criterion is captured in the all-encompassing question ‘Does the submission expose practice as research?’ The remainder of the sub-criteria may be seen as more specific refinements of this question. The explanatory notes accompanying the question make it clear that the *JAR* editors have an open conception of what academic research is. ‘The submission need not comply with all (or even one) of the points listed here.’ In line with the liberalisation of academia as traced in previous chapters, *JAR* not only endorses the emancipation of non-discursive knowledge forms, unconventional research methods, and enhanced modes of presentation, but it also assumes that the boundaries of academia are not fixed. As science and technology studies also have shown us, academia is not a stable system, but one that is constantly evolving, one whose boundaries are continually shifting.

That is not to say, however, that no boundaries exist. Even if our beliefs and knowledge claims have no ultimate ontological or epistemological ground, the temporary stability of the academic system is

safeguarded by the methodological criterion of reflexivity (in the context of justification, at least; in the context of discovery, that stability is temporarily ensured by ‘immutable mobiles’ (Latour) or ‘technical objects’ (Rheinberger), and in the context of application by the effect or impact of the research). Like Neurath’s ship, artistic research is chronically underdetermined. A revision or rejection of criteria is possible only if some criteria are held constant, including the reflexivity criterion. Letting go of it would lead to a departure from academia. In this sense, *JAR* is also reflexive: ‘But one might question whether [the submission] does [comply with the points listed], and if not, what the artistic, aesthetic or intellectual rationale is.’ In the words of Catharina Dyrssen (2011: 91), in a review of *JAR* in the artistic research yearbook of the Swedish Research Council:

How then should the demands be stipulated, by whom and why, and what does this mean for *JAR*? Obviously it is not a question of pre-defined or self-appointed authorities who decide the game-rules but of a gradual debate, in which the arguments – in artistic and rhetorically critical form – hopefully increase sharpness and depth.

On the other elements of the assessment framework, I can be briefer. With respect to the originality criterion, which refers to innovation in content, form, or technique, some commentators wondered whether this is a permissible criterion for the field of artistic research. As one contributor to the *JAR* forum argued:

This one is problematic; whether a body of art must involve innovation (or novelty?) as a necessary condition for its being a valid part of a research process is not clear to me. A valid research process could use well-tried art processes (i.e. not innovative ones). Success in the art world does not require being a reflexive researcher (though that is not excluded).

Seemingly, then, there is indeed something to be said for relaxing this criterion, if not actually removing it. Although *JAR* intends to publish

significant work, that significance does not necessarily dwell in artistic newness. It may also lie in qualities such as an exceptional, original way in which the artistic is used as an instrument, as a method, as an argument, or is made to speak or to connect to other discursive or non-discursive parts of the exposition.

The originality criterion gains additional import, however, when viewed in relation to two other elements from the assessment framework: enhancement of knowledge and contextualisation. One may ask of every contribution what insights or experiences it delivers and how it relates to the current state of the art in the field it is relevant to. Originality pertains here primarily to these aspects.

With respect to knowledge enhancement, the guidelines ask ‘whether or not the submission provides new knowledge, interpretation, insights or experiences, and what (kind of) new knowledge, interpretation, insights or experiences these comprise’. One thing worth noting from this wording is that experiences are treated on a par with knowledge, interpretations, and insights. As I have pointed out in chapter 8, it is a point of debate of whether this experiential component of artistic research – the aesthetic experience – can be considered to belong to the space of reasons. Or does this experience, which, although cognitive, is non-conceptual and non-discursive, have no epistemological bearing? In itself, perhaps it does not, though opinions differ. Now this just happens to bring into focus one of the particular dimensions that the Research Catalogue and *JAR* are intended to address. At the moment that the exposition links the artwork to other non-discursive and discursive elements, the artistic work that evokes aesthetic experiences becomes transformed into an epistemic thing (Rheinberger). And precisely because the work is not fully transparent, our thinking is set in motion, meanings may loom, and realities may be constituted. The knowledge that lies enclosed in the aesthetic experience and that is embodied in the art, and the reality that is enacted and constituted in artistic practices, both manifest and articulate themselves in and through the artistic research as exposed.

With regard to the question of ‘whether or not the submission is contextualised’, one participant in the debate commented:

[It] is debatable how explicitly or implicitly the artistic researcher needs to demonstrate that s/he is aware of the context and how much s/he needs to give explicit connections. I can imagine here also non-verbal or semi-verbal solutions [...]

Analogously to the other criteria, what is especially important here is how convincing the contextualisation is to the research community, and not a predetermined mould in which that contextualisation is to be cast. That said, this criterion does seem to demand much of the artist-researcher: a positioning with respect to social, artistic, and/or theoretical issues and to relevant work by oneself and other artists. Here too, however, the wording of the question leaves room for the artist to make a reflexive choice that is appropriate for the exposition – ‘which may include ...’, ‘and if not, if such an omission matters’.

A similar qualification applies to the criterion about the research question – ‘and if not, if such an omission matters’. At first glance, this would seem to nullify the criterion, but in fact it testifies to the reflexivity and openness of *JAR*. An issue may often, but not necessarily always, be raised in the form of a written question that is then addressed using research methods. The guidelines refer to ‘a description or exposition’. *JAR* deliberately invites artists to consider presenting their research topic (issue, question, problem) by artistic means. And here, again, the power of persuasion is the ultimate measure: Is the problem pertinently, convincingly, and compellingly introduced and articulated? The topics addressed by the *JAR* contributions can and will, of course, be widely divergent. Focuses may lie on the artistic material, on the creative process, or (as will frequently be the case) on social or other issues that may initially seem to be outside the true domain of the artistic, but which are brought forward, or even rendered ‘visible’, by the artwork or artistic practice.

This also highlights the transdisciplinary character of *JAR* (without, of course, precluding *intra*-disciplinary research). Transdisciplinarity is distinguishable from multidisciplinarity or interdisciplinarity by the fundamental ways in which the premises of the discipline(s) are, or can be, challenged in the light of a situation that is indeterminate. Transdisciplinarity may be understood in three ways in the context of *JAR*. Art research can form ties with other academic, scholarly, or scientific disciplines, and this

partly involves rendering the methodological and epistemological viewpoints of artistic research fruitful and fluid in the other academic context (and vice versa). Within the domain of the arts, transdisciplinarity may also concern the relationship between the artistic research and current concerns in art, what is important in the art world (and how 'research' is understood there) – briefly, the relationship between academia and art – which is always a turbulent one. Finally, transdisciplinarity in the context of *JAR* refers to ways in which artistic research may engage with other life domains, with the physical or social environment, with politics, with globalisation, with identity or other realms.

All these forms and instances of transdisciplinarity also always involve transformations (Latour). Academic research is transformed by the 'practice turn' that is ideal-typically performed in artistic research. Our understanding of the art world and academia is transformed by the entry of artistic research into both domains. And, more modestly, the world we live in is transformed by the artistic-reflexive constitution of alternatives.

The methodological element in the *JAR* assessment framework is examined by the question about 'the adequacy and soundness of the methods used and the thoroughness of research, analysis, and experiment'. In the workshop held to discuss the review process for *JAR*, conducted at the conference in Bern where issue 0 of *JAR* was launched, several participants registered their objections, not so much to the idea that the research must be methodologically justifiable, but to the way this 'criterion' was formulated in terms like 'adequacy' and 'thoroughness'. The workshop summary put it as follows:

There were suggestions within the group that the guidelines for the peer reviewers not be overly prescriptive, allowing scope for individual interpretation, and there were contestations that the peer review guidelines were academic in a 'scientific' fashion in describing what research was. [...] It is felt that the guidelines as written have the possibility of frightening artists away from presenting that material for review.²⁰

20. See: <<http://www.jar-online.net/app/webroot/uploads/SAR%20AGM%20Minutes%202011.pdf>> 11 [accessed 7 January 2012].

It is important to note that those attending in Bern were mainly people who are amenable towards artistic research and towards *JAR*. Though such warning signals have not yet led to adaptations to how the criterion is formulated, to a different choice of words, that is expected to happen later. After all, part of the mission of *JAR* (and of the Society for Artistic Research) is to also connect to those artists and art practices that stand further away from academia.

The final element of the assessment framework, documentation, and dissemination, brings us to the third guideline for peer reviewers, which specifies that the artistic and intellectual proposition underlying a contribution should be supported by the design of the exposition and the mode of navigation through it.

Design and navigation

This is the question that the peer review form puts to the assessors:

Does the exposition design and navigation support the (artistic) proposition? A basic, legible design is preferred, provided it does not pose an obstacle to the presentation of the exposition. Whenever design choices differ from basic design, they will have to make sense (even if this sense might be ‘confusion’ at times).

Please take into account:

- if the design and navigation support the exposition;
- if you think a correct or feasible use of referencing is used in the submission;
- the readability of the submission (including the use of the written English language).

It is not necessary to comment here on the language issue (*JAR* is officially multilingual, but all expositions must also be submitted in copy-edited English) nor on the guidelines pertaining to the use of footnotes and references, the citation method, and the composition and format of bibliographies. *JAR* expects these to be consistent and asks authors to use the author-date citation style of the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA). Yet the format of *JAR* itself does necessitate

an exceptional way of making references from and to *JAR*. This calls for a brief explanation.

The publications in *JAR* (and in the *RC*) are called 'expositions' in order to make it clear that a transformation occurs from an aesthetic project to an artistic argument. Expositions in *JAR* consist of one or more 'pages'. These are web pages on which the research material (text, images, sound recordings, videos) is interwoven in ways that allow the artistic work to manifest itself as research. The ways in which the material is arranged on the pages may have meaning for what is being told; the content of the exposition does not stand in isolation from the design of the exposition, nor from the ways that the 'reader' is able to navigate through the exposition. In this way, *JAR* enables the artist to deviate from the standard format of journal articles. In the first place, this is because images and sounds are not subordinate to, but fundamentally on a par with the text; but it is also because the opportunity is provided to break out of linear narrative structure. *JAR* does offer the artist-authors a basic design guide, but everyone is free to diverge from it if they can make clear why.

Pages can theoretically stretch out infinitely in two dimensions. What appears on the computer screen is an 'aspect' of the page, a selection. Navigation tools make it possible to move that aspect to other parts of the page, just as one scrolls through web pages. The computer screen can be shifted, as it were, over the page in all directions. *JAR* makes it possible to make references to these 'aspects'; each aspect has a unique URL that can be retrieved by a simple mouse click and cited elsewhere. Hyperlinks in and between pages expand the battery of navigation and citation options. Artworks and art practices, or representations of them, which are identified uniquely in the database by different media files, can also be 'cited'. The Society for Artistic Research, which runs the journal, has devoted considerable attention to the copyright issues involved here. The files in the database, the elements of the page (including images, texts, and sound clips), the pages themselves, and the entire exposition are tagged with meta-data, making the expositions in *JAR* and in the *RC* retrievable in bibliographic searches and compatible in principle with the formats of other academic repositories. This makes *JAR* an 'enhanced publication', whose multifarious

research materials are accessible to others in accordance with the open-access principle.

Usually, the design of a publication (for instance, the way a text is arranged on a page) is not a subject of peer review. What is important in *JAR* is the manner in which artists expose their work as research. This warrants the inclusion of a separate section on this dimension in the reviewers' guidelines. At present, most artist-researchers are still choosing a 'classical' format and hierarchy: a continuous vertical or horizontal text running parallel to visual or sound elements. Some, however, have chosen different approaches, such as inviting the user to more associative navigation or building in well-reasoned choices into the navigation route.

Improving the peer review; feedback from reviewers

JAR was created to support the emerging field of artistic research, in and beyond academia. The 'open submission' process (the opportunity to self-publish art as research in and through the Research Catalogue), the planned provision for open-process collaboration and commentary in the RC, and the publication of peer review reports alongside the expositions – all these are aimed at creating a discursive field where research can flourish and develop. *JAR*'s policy is to seek possibilities to strengthen artistic research and its culture. The aim is not in the first place to decide what does and does not belong to the field, but to encourage those working in the field to progress. In the course of events, we have realised that *JAR* needs to ask its reviewers more explicitly to seek the potential in submissions and to seek ways of improving the research expositions. The guidelines for reviewing – as sedimented in the peer review form – have therefore been adjusted since November 2011: a specific section on 'recommendations' has been added, in which reviewers are asked to state what the potential of the submission is and how improvements might be made.

When reviewers were asked whether their reviews could be published (under their name or anonymously), the overall response was very positive. Two examples:

I am happy for you to publish the process in the way that you describe. That seems to me to be a very innovative thing to do, and I hope that the other reviewers agree. It will make a very useful resource for writers and reviewers, and will be of particular interest to research students and early career researchers.

I am impressed with the efficacy of this reviewing system. Proceeding case by case, we have here a tool for improving the level of artistic research projects as a whole. My congratulations for this very valuable work!²¹

Of the thirty reviewers who worked on the published exposition, twenty-six responded positively to the request to publish the reports. Their reports can be accessed via the expositions in *JAR*.

Close

This brings the story of the creation and workings of the *Journal for Artistic Research*, focusing on the assessment criteria for submissions, to a close. *JAR* is still in a germinal stage. I have traced how *JAR* came into being – how a dynamic network of human and non-human actors grew up around the new journal, becoming materially and strategically more stable and durable all the time. I have examined the role played by ‘immutable mobiles’ – particularly the research catalogue and the peer review form – in the development of *JAR*. And I have shown how these and other (f)actors bring about transformations in the emerging field of artistic research. Documented artistic practices transform into exposed artistic research. Academia transforms into a reflexive domain in which non-discursive knowledge forms, unconventional research methods, and enhanced modes of presentation have a place. The art world transforms, slowly coming to understand itself in a different light with the advent of artistic research. And the human actors in this field – artists and academics, editors and reviewers, software designers, and policymakers – transform into allies in a common cause. In *JAR*, the new field of research is articulated, a new

21. From email correspondence with two reviewers.

reality is shaped. *JAR* is not so much a response to an altered reality as the articulation of a proposition – a proposal made by artistic research to academia and the art world. Latour has conceived for this the expression ‘constructivist realism’.