

To reach the world outside – a basic dilemma in artistic research?

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To reach the world outside...why? Is this a problem? I think artistic research is facing a dilemma here. Let me try to sketch the picture I see as an introduction for a discussion.

There are two basic different perspectives on artistic research; on one hand the development of foundations and methodologies of art and design itself and on the other hand artistic work as research methodology. In the latter case we so to speak introduce artistic, i.e. non scientific, methods in various more or less well established areas of research, typically we use artistic ways of working to introduce forms of critical reflection.

The development of foundations and methodologies of art and design itself builds on a long and well-established tradition of improving and changing the techniques and methods of art as well as the programmatic foundations of art practice. Artistic research in this sense is very strongly linked to what we call artistic development work. The way we address and engage with what we see around us is indirect in this case.

The idea of artistic research as research methodology clearly answers in a more direct sense to the challenge as to how we as artistic researchers, through critical reflection, address and engage with what we see around us. The very idea is somehow to use artistic ways of working to engage in areas outside art itself.

How can artistic research make a meaningful and relevant contribution outside of itself?

Is this a question on how to reach outside research itself?

All forms of research have to answer to this challenge by results that make a difference. Physics gave us the atom bomb, but also efficient systems for electrical power distribution. Seemingly esoteric mathematics, highly abstract and immensely difficult to understand, makes a difference everywhere in our lives. Art and design make a difference in our lives.

But where is the borderline between art, artistic work and research in artistic research?

- If we focus on research is this in any meaningful sense anything else than what has always been going on in research, where critical aesthetics and artistic insight always have

played a central role?

I would, for instance, argue that foundational work in science in a certain sense is a form of artistic research and that this is artistic critical reflection that address and engage with what we see around us. Foundational work depends on abilities to express foundational insights.

- If we, on the other hand, focus on artistic expression is this in any meaningful way anything else than just artistic work?

There is a basic dilemma here:

- If artistic research means development of the foundations for artistic work, then we leave the outside world to dwell on art itself,
- If artistic research means using artistic ways of working in research, then we leave art for the outside world, i.e. for other areas of investigations.

It is as if art itself is the outside world in artistic research and that the contact with the world outside is somewhat more indirect.

- How do we as artistic researchers, through critical reflection, address and engage with what we see around us?
- How can artistic research make a meaningful and relevant contribution outside of itself? And how can it acknowledge the responsibility of art and research towards the world outside the academy?

If artistic research means development of the foundations of artistic work we don't. If artistic research means using artistic ways of working in research areas outside art itself we do.

But as we claim to do research we always have to meet the challenge of meaningful and relevant contributions and acknowledge the responsibility of research towards the world outside the academy. In the end there must be results of our research activities that make a difference. It is never enough to meet this challenge by saying that it is artistic work.

You say it is art. That you work as an artist in research. So what? Where is the result that motivates your work as research?

In view of the dilemma sketched here I think that the main thematic questions for this years Sensuous Knowledge conference can be rephrased as follows

- What impact does the development of foundations and methodologies of art as an academic area of research have on the actual development of art itself?
- What impact does artistic work as research methodology have on the development of given areas of research?

The notion of a research result is the critical issue here. The development of foundations and methodologies of art as an academic area of research make sense as long as we produce results valuable for the actual development of art itself. Artistic work as research methodology make

sense as long as it produce results valuable for the development of the given area of research.

New systems of notation for performative art practice might be very interesting, new ways of working in action research might be very interesting.

But we have to observe the dilemma here. It doesn't make sense to look for a direct contact with the world outside in the development of foundations and methodologies of art as an academic area of research and it doesn't help very much to motivate artistic work as research methodology by saying that it is art.

The idea of knowledge as the key notion is grossly misleading here, i.e. the idea to motivate artistic research through other epistemological categories enriching traditional research. It is not at all simple minded to just think of research as looking around, digging to develop and further things. Results of such activities come in many forms; what is common is that these results in one way or another open up for development.

The idea of research as an activity mainly involved in so-called "knowledge production" comes from a very narrow view of research.

All these epistemological distinctions – theoretical, practical, tacit, performative knowledge – just muddle up things and hide the fundamental role that expressive constructions play in research.

If we look for a characterization of artistic research, then suggestions and insights is perhaps better conceptual tools to use than knowledge. We construct things, systems, concepts, events to display suggestions and insights. It is backwards research, the motivations comes in terms of the usefulness of the suggestions and the insights. It is not propositions we prove to be true, it is rather definitions we suggest. Statements, descriptions, judgments and comments we make as artists take the form of suggestions for change, suggestions for development in a given context.

Let us look at four typical example of artistic research.

Artistic interventions – When is this art and when is it a form of action research?

Artistic interventions as qualitative research methodology:

A thought provoking artistic intervention, performance opening up for critical reflection ... this can be a component of investigations in several areas of research that focus on social and cultural issues. As research it becomes a matter of research design where we use artistic, expressive skills to stage and display situations, to open up and define the object of study. But it is not the result, it provide foundations.

What would it mean to claim the intervention to be the result? It is certainly a result of artistic work, but what could it be as a research result? It stages and displays something. The result somehow resides in interpretations of what that is. Such an interpretation could focus on social and cultural issues or it could focus on the methodology and techniques used in the intervention. In the first case the intervention becomes part of social and cultural research and in the second

case it is more a matter of artistic development work. Leaving the interpretation aside it is simply artistic work.

Reflections on artistic processes – When is this art theory and when is it artistic development work?

Reflections on artistic processes as hermeneutics of artistic work:

Artistic research can take the form of combining artistic work with reflections on process and techniques. If there is a strong focus on comments and documentations of specific artistic work it seems difficult to distinguish this as research from art theory and art history.

It is a rather different matter when artistic work itself displays development of work methods and techniques and reflections take the form of definitions and documentations of methodology and techniques. This is an important distinction to make in motivating this type of work as artistic research.

Critical design – When is this artistic research and when is it cultural studies research?

Critical design as design and cultural critique:

Critical design is design for critical reflection. There are close links to conceptual art practice. So what makes it into research?

One answer could be that we use the design in a research context as a methodological tool.

Another answer could be that the design itself display insights of general interest and that it therefore can be viewed as a research result and a piece of artwork at the same time. It is critique in the context of academic research.

The problem comes when we start asking question about validity and precision. It what way does it communicate knowledge and insights open for critical assessment?

The research-studies-art-projects – When is this art and when is it research?

The research-studies-art-projects as ethnographical studies:

Artistic research can take the form of investigations and documentations. But when is it research as art and when is it art as research and what is the difference? What makes it different from say research in journalism? To say that it is artistic in nature does not help very much.

What the dilemma points at is somehow that if we pretend to do research we leave the sanctuary of art and step into another world, whatever that means. It doesn't help to call it artistic research.

A distinction between scientific foundations and artistic foundations make at the same time sense in research if it points to a distinction between

- producing knowledge in the sense of establishing facts/proving propositions, and,
- displaying suggestions in the sense of expressing foundations/introducing definitions.

The duality between scientific research and artistic research then resides in that we go about planning and doing things on scientific foundations and we go about doing scientific research on artistic foundations. It is not in the direction of scientific research results we should look, but rather in the direction of foundations of scientific research.

Artistic research relates to expressing foundational insights. It can be a matter of introducing new methods and techniques in artistic work, but it can also be a matter of suggesting new foundations in theoretical physics. It is nothing new, it is the somewhat hidden area of research where expressiveness and aesthetics always have been of major importance. We cannot prove a foundational definition, it is a matter of expressing insights.

The relation to the world outside is in some sense very direct with respect to motivations, but perhaps more indirect with respect to results. The direction of art itself is different.