

about - long version

Troubling Research. Performing Knowledge in the Arts.

1. Aims and objectives

1.1 Key challenge: from problem to problematic

Troubling Research responds to the WWTF Art(s)&Sciences call by setting out to interrogate the very conditions of the current upsurge of the art/research articulation. Instead of tackling a particular 'problem' by deploying a 'research' methodology that organizes artists and researchers from different fields of practice, artistic or scientific, around a shared task of finding 'solutions' to the given problem, this project aims at an inquiry of the necessities, constraints and potentials of the research attitude in the fine arts as such. The WWTF Art(s)&Sciences initiative joins a larger international network of activities pursuing the institutional implementation and conceptual development of 'artistic research' or 'arts-based research' which has elicited a lively and controversial debate about the consequences of this research turn at academic art institutions (cf. various issues of the *Journal of Visual Arts Practice*, vol. 6ff., 2007ff., Slager/Balkema 2004, Hannula et.al. 2005, Borgdorff 2006, MacLeod/Holdridge 2006, Barrett/Bolt 2007, Lesage/Busch 2007, Elkins 2008, Hlavajova et.al. 2008, Holert 2009). As such it already partakes in the production of a discourse that is going to be scrutinized and historicised by the proposed project. For what is it that makes the institutional context of practice-based PhDs or Doctoral Studies in Fine Art (DFA) so different, so appealing? Does this new institutional context maintain or break the links with earlier and current practices of research-based art such as that of Dan Graham, Susan Hiller, Mike Kelley, Mary Kelly, Silvia Kolbowski, Yvonne Rainer, Mark Dion, Rene'e Green, Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Müller, Simon Starling, Sean Snyder, Matthew Buckingham, Wali'd Raad and others? The key challenge of Troubling Research therefore is to shift attention from defining (and eventually solving) a problem to that of rendering a problematic, the problematic implied in the conjunction of 'art' and 'research'.

1.2 The project's aim: unsettling a consensus by fostering curiosity, potentiality and perplexity

One core aspect of this problematic resides in the fact that place, status, and function of any claim to 'research' – as being a specific mode of operation facilitating the production of artworks that contribute to the development and expansion of knowledge and experience in an analytical manner – are discursively and socially produced and therefore, due to their constructed nature, ultimately contestable. In accordance with this assumption, albeit in a different context, the insight in the "ubiquitous, taken-for- granted, and axiomatic quality of research" has led cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 2001) to question – not only historically, but anthropologically – the "strange and wonderful practice" that is known as research, its "cultural presumptions" and its "ethic". Fundamental concerns of scientific reasoning are also to be reconsidered, such as the testing of theory (including the replication of experiments), the assessment of evidence, the bearing of theoretical and metaphysical assumptions on the reality of scientific objects, and the interaction of subjective and objective factors in scientific inquiry (cf. Daston 2008). Following these types of questioning (and curiosity) Troubling Research aims at unsettling any consensus concerning the ontology and functionality of arts-based research and the art/science relationship through fostering a – necessarily – heterogeneous cluster of artistic and research practices (represented by the co-authors) whose commonality is the very critical potential and aesthetic perplexity to be excavated and/or constituted in the course of the project. However, while considering themselves as researchers and sharing many assumptions concerning the kind of research they are performing as a group, the project's members may also diverge in some of their positions regarding specific traditions and ideas associated with the notion of research. As the epistemological and institutional context(s) of arts-based research call for careful and critical readings of their political, economic and cultural conditions (material and discursive), the interests and investments in this emerging field are to be considered in the most self-reflective manner possible. At the same time the questioning of one's own position and of the research paradigm as such should be kept open and experimental.

1.3 Main strands of Troubling Research The project focuses on different existing research strands, namely

- the cultural history of concepts such as 'research', 'science' or 'knowledge production' in relation to twentieth and twenty-first century modernist and postmodernist art (cf. Jones 1996, Harris, 1999, Lee 2004, Buchmann 2007, Broeckmann/Nadarajan 2008) - the theories of performance and performativity in how they relate to fine arts practices and

the staging and display of knowledge and reflexivity (cf. Phelan 1993, Parker/Sedgwick 1995, Bal 2002b, Fischer-Lichte et.al. 2003, Bial 2004, Fischer-Lichte 2004, Auslander 2007, Loxley 2007) - the critique of institutional logics and truth games as an essential concern of postconceptual artistic traditions (cf. for a critical overview: Fraser 2005, see also Bryan-Wilson 2003, Nowotny/Raunig 2008). Each of these strands has engendered a more or less substantial body of scholarly literature – the field of performance studies, for example, has been expanding continuously since the early 1990s. The historical study of the art/science junction, however, especially when concerned with the issue of artistic knowledge production as a critical reflection of dominant paradigms of scientific truth and objectivity, is still rather underdeveloped. Thus, the research of the various histories of institutional critique that has entailed a wide-ranging scholarship will constitute an important toolbox rendering potentially useful applications for the analysis and critique of the art/research compound.

1.4 Principal objective: considering the ‘research attitude’

The project aims at a. encouraging art practitioners to reconsider and problematize their own and others’ ‘research attitude’ in the light of the current discursive upsurge around artistic/arts-based/studio-led research in art education in Europe. The project will thus strengthen art practitioners in their ability to critically reflect on the ‘research’ dimension of different artistic projects by exemplarily pursuing and making available for discussion projects that focus thematically on the effects of notions such as reflexivity, research and knowledge production on artistic practice and performance practices in particular. It will furthermore provide as one of its key results a historically and theoretically substantiated set of conceptual instruments to analyse the political, ethical, aesthetic, ontological and epistemological scope and preconditions of the ‘research’ component in fine arts, and how this component informs and inflects each individual practice. It will also make available for discussion and revision different approaches and attitudes towards ‘research’, knowledge production and auto-documentation in selected areas and periods of historical and contemporary artistic practice (Judson Dance Theatre, New York, in the early 1960s; the anti-psychiatric movement in Italy in the early 1970s; post-conceptual practices of feminist and queer artists and art collectives in Europe of the 1990s and 2000s). b. enhancing the awareness of the political and economic contingency, the cultural and aesthetic performativity and the epistemological unconscious of past and current research ‘turns’ in the fine arts. Pursuing these goals the proposed project advances a methodological ‘troubling’ of the belief in the possibility of appropriate ‘research’ designs which assumes the need for identifying a ‘problem’ that is supposed to be subsequently worked upon by deploying a methodologically reliable and validated research procedure. The project hence questions the viability and feasibility of certain traditions within the natural sciences and the humanities for the realm of artistic practices. Accounting for a multiplicity of diverging and loosely aligned perspectives, the participating researchers will work, independently and as a collaborative entity, towards a problematization of the very feedback relation that is entailed between the categories of art and research by the current politics and economy-driven research orientation within the European art education system.

2. Methods

Therefore the questions of Troubling Research are linked to and derived from the problematization of the increased interest in the fine arts as providers of ‘new knowledge’ to be arrived at by using research methods: - When did and does ‘research’ happen in a given art practice? - What is altered when artists act as researchers instead of being the objects of research? - How is this research informed and shaped by the fine art context and how, in return, is the artistic practice informed and shaped by academic rules and regulations of research? - To what extent are the parameters of research defined by the practitioners and how do they proceed in order to get their research (methods and outcomes) recognised and validated inside and outside the art context? - How is artistic (self-)reflexiveness formalized, institutionalized and reconfigured in the emerging research context? In following this set of key questions, Troubling Research will apply methods that are informed by institutional critique, feminist, queer and postcolonial theory, methods of social art history, discourse analysis, the sociology of knowledge, theories of the performative – as well as by methodologies developed in and derived from the field of practice-bound artistic inquiry. Conceiving the research process the project relies on a notion of interdisciplinarity that is defined “not as surrounding a chosen object with numerous modes of scientific inquiry, but rather as the constitution of a new object of knowledge” (Rogoff 1998).

2.1 Institutional Critique

A key methodological strand of Troubling Research is the tradition of Institutional Critique in the arts (Fraser 2005, Nowotny/Raunig 2008). The emerging art/research compound will be considered in terms of an analysis of the discursive and practical frameworks it both engenders and presupposes. Institutions such as the system of research funding and the art university are objective realities produced by specific agents and agencies. Following advice given by sociologists of knowledge Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Berger/Luckmann 1966), the structure and integration of an institutional

order can only be understood on the basis of the knowledge that its members have of it. Hence analysis of this knowledge is decisive for the analysis of the given institutional regime. In this sense, the critique/analysis of the supposedly 'new' institution of artistic research will be pursued via in-depth inquiries into the knowledges and experiences that have been (and are currently being) generated in different historical and contemporary situations where 'research' is explicitly claimed as a mode of operation by individual artists and artist groups or is being tacitly implied in their practice. This archaeology of research in the arts is based on methods of social art history, discourse analysis and the sociology of knowledge.

2.2 Problematization and Performativity

While seeking a problematization of research in the arts and the relation of artists to protocols and infrastructures of research, a determinedly practice-based approach is applied. The concept of 'problematization' is used here according to Michel Foucault's two-sided definition: as the constitution of problems as objects of thought and as a method to explore this very constitutive process (cf. Foucault 1985). Foucault introduced the term to link his projects of "archaeology" (the analysis and description of the forms of problematization, e.g. a moral reflexion, a scientific finding, a political analysis etc.) and of "genealogy" (the inquiry into the practices that lead to the forms of problematization). As significant aspects of the thematic threads that form the planned project's structure (see below, 2.3) are informed by the history of the performing arts and performance art in particular, theories of performance and performativity, especially as developed in the disciplinary realm of performance studies, are of utmost importance to the project (cf. 1.3).

2.3 Thematic Threads

Troubling Research is deliberately organized as following the momentums of eight different thematic threads provided by the participating researchers, rather than organizing the project workers around a single research question. The project is tied together by the persuasion that only a decidedly experimental and explorative, process-oriented approach will stimulate the kind of awareness and attentiveness for one's own strategies of problematization that could count as a precondition of the practice of a community of researchers that may even transcend the straightforward operability of research units and become an "inoperative community" (Nancy 1991), a community that is neither a project of fusion nor production but defined through the political nature of its resistance against immanent power. How these threads are eventually to be woven into the texture of the project documentation is a central methodological as well as aesthetic concern to be negotiated along the way among the project partners. Negotiation as a conflictual mode of exchange is to form a core element of the endeavour, since the production of a reflective research community is one of the key objectives of Troubling Research. Thus openness and indeterminacy are as crucial to the project as precision and comprehensibility.

2.4 Toolbox

To summarize, the methodical toolbox of Troubling Research can be considered as plural and eclectic by design and necessity, since the group sets out to capture the very heterogeneity and diversity of artistic practice that precedes (as much as it is entailed by) 'research'. Moreover, the thematic structure of the project mirrors the variety and scope of approaches implicit in these methodological claims which aim at destabilising any presumed idea of 'arts-based research' while at the same time fostering a productive recuperation of the research trope through a genealogical and archaeological investigating of its very (art) history. The relationship between 'practice' and 'theory', or 'production' and 'post-production' for that matter, is not considered as a given by the project; nor are the circumstances and the way the composition of this particular group of practitioners has come about. Contiguity (breaching the assumed theory/practice division) and contingency (spawning and shaping collaborations, affinities, friendships etc.) are methodologically acknowledged as being of the greatest socio-epistemological importance for any research endeavour that is sufficiently aware of the findings of the anthropologies and sociologies of art and science alike. The modalities of artistic and institutional 'assemblage' are to be addressed on the level of how the 'thematic threads' (as outlined below) relate to each other, running in parallel, crossing paths, and/or reflecting and commenting on each other. Accordingly, the 'art' should not be reduced to the level of the material object and its aesthetic qualities alone. Instead it is to be recognized as an intricate part of a social materiality, of specific (yet to be analysed) ways of communicating, networking, interacting. Thus, the specific topicality of each individual thematic thread may bear the potential of branching out, thereby contributing to the (self-)understanding of the project as a whole. The choice of research 'themes' already implicates a certain spectrum of methods, constituted by a selective archive of theoretical and practical knowledge. The extended history of performance and performativity studies has been named already, as could theories concerned with text/image relations, narratologies and the ideologies and technologies of display (cf. Bal 1991, Rogoff/Sherman 1994, Prelli 2006, Muttenthaler/Wonisich 2006)

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