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The messiness of doing v. the integrity of action: towards an embodied ethics of artistic research

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Abstract:

Doctoral programmes in artistic research have existed for some time; it is only more recently that some of these, for example in Norway, have begun to confer the title of PhD. This development opens up a contemporary critical space in which questions of the basic legitimacy of artistic research are being superseded by ones that interrogate its more specific attributes and credentials. As they become increasingly rich and sophisticated, these questions address artistic and intellectual but also ethical issues. This essay aims to provide a working sketch of the current situation and to propose possible models for future developmental work on ethics in artistic research. The ethical dimension is important because it challenges us to consider more closely the relationship between the artistic and the research elements in artistic research. In particular, it forces us to look critically at the value and purpose of the art-making component of this hybrid endeavour, a process which includes questioning the power structures that relate both to art itself and to the institutions in which it is practised as part of an academic environment.

Introduction

Doctoral programmes in artistic research have now been in existence for more than two decades under a variety of titles that generally attempt to reflect the artistic discipline in which the research has been undertaken. It is only more recently that some of these programmes, for example in Norway, have begun to confer upon those achieving successful completion the older and more generic title of PhD. On the one hand, this change signals a growing recognition of artistic research as a viable discipline within the framework of academic research-degree programmes and, hence, as a career pathway to academic positions; on the other, it has opened up a contemporary critical space in which questions of the basic legitimacy of artistic research are being superseded by those addressing its more specific credentials: artistic, intellectual and ethical.

Giving the title of PhD to an artistic research doctorate inevitably re-kindles debates that examine artistic research critically in relation to a scientific paradigm.[1] Given that the holder of an artistic doctorate is now accorded a title identical to that of a specialist in, say, physics or mathematics, it becomes pertinent to ask whether a PhD in artistic research is fully the equal of its scientific counterparts in terms of what it says about the breadth and depth of expertise of someone holding it. And what of that expertise itself: is it accepted as fully compatible with scientific knowledge, including in its ethical aspects, or is it tainted with the same connotations of *gnoseologia inferior* within which the C18th philosopher Alexander Baumgarten was obliged to map out his vision of a sensuous knowledge?[2] Our immediate reaction may be either to rush to a partisan defence of our discipline in the terms posed or to argue against the very assumption that the debate should be framed from the scientific perspective. But both responses raise an important ethical question: is loyalty to our discipline an excuse for less than rigorously critical self-examination? And, if not, what should be the rules of engagement governing our advocacy for artistic research? Can it be situated within an ethically responsible framework that, whilst having due regard for scientific paradigms, is also confident enough to develop and promulgate those of its own?

Essential to this last point is the notion that the ethical challenges facing artistic research concern not only its research aspect but also its artistic content. As our ethical discourses within the artistic research community become increasingly rich and sophisticated, they also challenge us to widen our perspectives. We have an obligation to consider not just how art functions in artistic research but also how ethical factors impinge on the nature of artmaking

1 For a detailed analysis of this point, see Henk Borgdorff. 2012. *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. (Leiden: Leiden University Press).

2 As cited in Umberto Eco. 2000. *Kant and the Platypus* (London: Random House), pp.31-35.

more generally - a process which includes questioning the power structures related both to art itself and to the institutions in which it is practised as part of an academic environment.

This essay aims to provide a working sketch of the current situation, especially as it applies in Norway, and to propose possible models for future developmental work on ethics in artistic research. The ideas presented may help to frame our inquiries into research ethics and artistic research at a timely, perhaps even a critical, moment for arts and humanities-based research work; and this sense of timeliness – not to say urgency – relates precisely to one of the key aims presented here: to consider the current state of artistic research in light of the real-world activity that it generates and from which it emanates – namely artistic creation.

What does such consideration mean for those both inside and outside the discipline? In principle, the engagement of the artist in the research act (or that of the researcher in the act of artistic creation) means that the object of enquiry – the artwork – is also the locus, in the most literal and physical sense, of the processes that bring it into being. An artist's practice is, by definition, hands-on; to what extent can it therefore also be cerebral, dispassionate and objective, as befits the practice of a researcher? We may speak of 'honest toil' suggesting an ethical integrity in physical activity, but this does not stop us often putting a premium on the products of intellectual endeavour over those of concrete action. The 'messiness of doing' referred to in the title of this essay reflects the way in which things given physical form in the world rarely retain the conceptual purity of the ideas by which they may have been inspired.

Nevertheless, while there may be a general tendency to give primacy to mind over matter, this is usually done on the basis that the products of the mind's ruminations should be relevant to the onward progress of humanity – a widespread formulation is that they should

'contribute to knowledge and understanding'. Relating this to artistic research gives rise to a question that is primarily philosophical, albeit with ethical connotations. Even assuming that the objective/subjective dilemma noted above can be resolved, can a piece of research the object of whose enquiry is embedded in an artwork tell us meaningfully universal things about the world beyond that artwork? And, if not, what value does it truly have? The challenge is neatly summed up by Umberto Eco:

> […] having equated the perfection of knowledge with an understanding of the universal, we reduce poetic knowledge to a kind of halfway house between the perfection of a generalizing knowledge, revealed through the discovery of laws, and the perfection of knowledge that was predominantly individualizing: the poet conveys to us the nuances of color in a leaf, but he doesn't tell us what Color is.[3]

This distinction between a generalising and an individualising knowledge takes us right to the heart of an issue that is as crucial for the artist as it is for the researcher: namely, 'what's at stake?'. As proponents of artistic research, we should naturally wish to respond 'a great deal', but, echoing the maxim that 'with great power comes great responsibility', we must then accept that where a great deal is at stake, the way in which we conduct ourselves and guard against loose thinking or action is correspondingly important. To illustrate the issues more concretely, I shall take an example from the Norwegian situation.

What's at stake?

According to the website of the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme (NARP) as of autumn 2020, artistic research applications should include the following dimensions, the majority of which are stated as questions for the artist-researcher to consider. However, all of these dimensions seem to me to prompt questions relevant to the ethical context

[3] Umberto Eco, op. cit., p. 32. Eco is careful to explain that he intends Poetry and Poet to be understood as synecdoches for Art and Artist.

sketched out above.[4] I have indicated after each dimension the principal question that I feel it generates:

1) What is the project's artistic core and intention, and what are the expected outcomes? – ***but are there not potential problems in attributing a singular intention to all art-making deemed to merit funding – and who gatekeeps the evaluation of how a given core and intention converts into merit? Furthermore, in the non-verbal arts, is this privileging of the verbal justification not a problem, given how the challenge of verbalising may not only intermingle with but even alter the artistic core and intention of the project?***

2) How will you work in the project? Which artistic research methods will be used within the different parts of the project? – ***but, again, does this mean that the project itself, or simply the words through which it is described, becomes the basis upon which judgements are made?***

3) How is the project organisation? Which resources will be made available for the project and who will do what in the different parts of the project? - ***but mightn't this imply that a well-organised but artistically mediocre project could be favoured over one that is innovative and risk-taking, and is there not a reciprocal risk of this being constraining to what might be some of the best examples of artistic research?***

[4] The dimensions for artistic research applications, as given by the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme, may be found at: https://diku.no/en/programmes/norwegian-artistic-research-programme, accessed on 19.10.2020. These are, of course, subject to periodic revision – at the time of the original drafting of this essay, they were nine in number, three of which have since been removed and five of the remaining six re-worded. For a more detailed account of the thinking behind the dimensions, see Nina Malterud, Torben Lai, Aslaug Nyrnes and Frode Thorsen. 2016. *Research and Development in the Arts: 1995-2015: Twenty Years of Artistic Research, the Working Group of the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme.* Accessible under Reports: https://diku.no/en/programmes/norwegian-artistic-research-programme

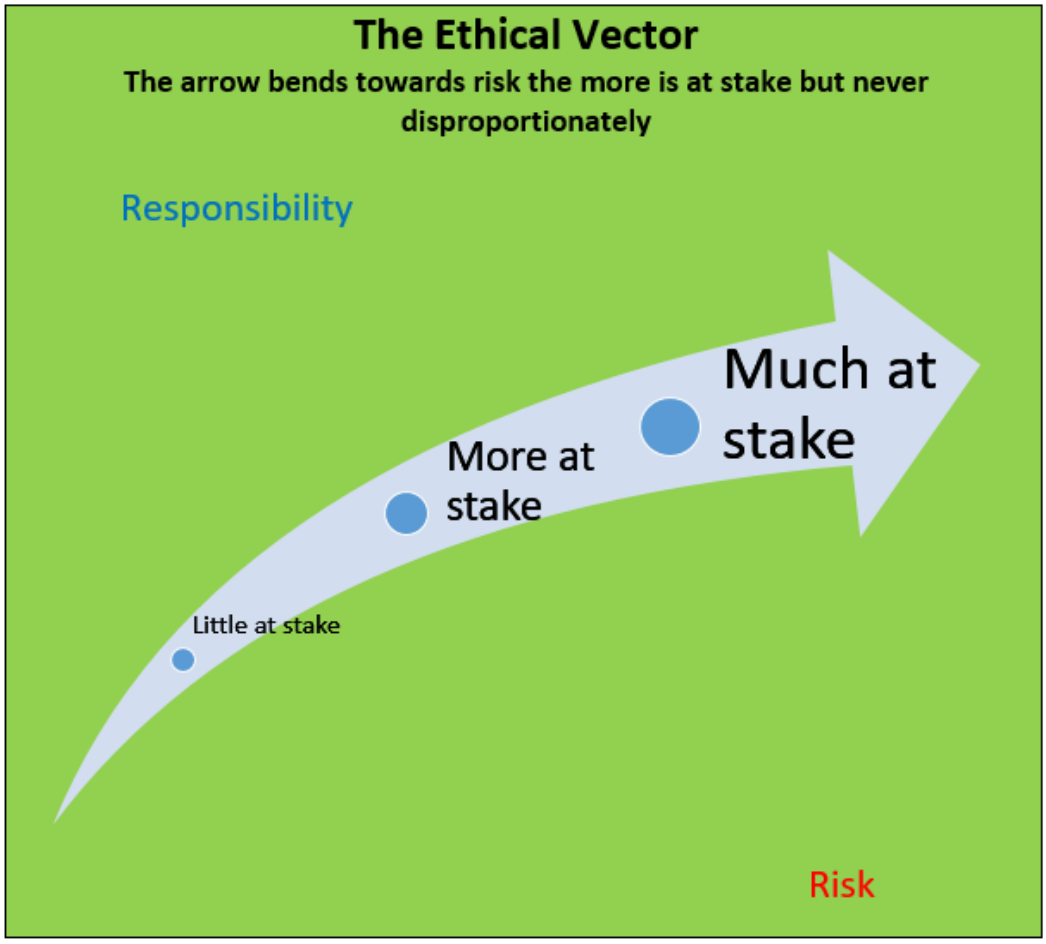
4) The activity plan of the project must be described. ***– but what constitutes 'activity' in this case and, echoing the point above, can the trajectory of creative practice necessarily be made to work to a predictable plan?***

5) How will the artistic research processes and results be disseminated throughout the project period and how are the plans for documentation and publishing? – ***but within an application process involving those not always familiar with artistic research publications online, does this not once again appear to privilege the written or spoken word, even where the intention is to avoid such delimitation?***

6) The potential challenges connected to the project implementation must be described. **– *but again, echoing point 3, how does a rationale based on challenge as risk, in which risk could be seen solely something to be managed or mitigated, square with the idea that meaningful art should embrace risk?***

Several of these questions, in particular the last, suggest a relationship between ethics and risk. As researchers, we have an ethical obligation to act responsibly (hence the paraphernalia of risk assessments, etc.); but, as artists, we 'risk' producing works that are timid and sterile if we eschew risk. If we believe there to be something at stake in what we do, then, surely, the more that is at stake, the greater the risk worth taking? And, if so, the avoidance of risk almost takes on the aspect of ethical irresponsibility. Or, putting it another way, the ethical equation hinges upon how many potentially undesirable things may be responsibly risked in the hope of achieving what's at stake. If little is at stake, then the possible negative collateral should be strictly circumscribed; if a great deal is at stake, then a greater element of possibly negative collateral may be acceptable in the hope of achieving the desired outcome.

Assuming that this argument is accepted, it follows that ethics, risk, responsibility and the significance of what is at stake are all inextricably interlinked. Their relationship might be characterised as an ethical vector. The vector moves in a dynamic equilibrium between responsibility and risk but the arrow bends towards risk the more that is at stake and the greater becomes the potential dividend of risk-taking. This relationship may be represented diagrammatically as follows:



So, if we want something to be at stake in our art (and surely, we should – the very use of the word 'should' suggesting that this, in itself, is a kind of ethical imperative) we must become adept at balancing risk and responsibility. Moreover, as artist-researchers, we must

achieve this in the realm of action, of being 'hands-on', and in a manner that is dynamically reactive to how much is at stake.

An example of the practical context for ethics

Consider for a moment our hands, how we use them and what they signify. On the one hand (and it is fascinating in itself that we use the embodied metaphor of our two equal but opposite hands when we set up any counterbalanced intellectual or conceptual duality), they are tools; they grasp things and release them elsewhere; they squeeze or stretch and thereby re-shape things; at the most basic level, they keep us alive, not least by enabling us to feed ourselves. But they are so much more than this. They are instruments of detection and exploration through which we come to understand and interact with the world around us; through them, we learn about softness and hardness, heaviness and lightness, heat and cold and all the subtle gradations between these binary extremes. And, still more wondrously, they teach us what to embrace and what to recoil from; they add gestural texture to our discourses and, in some cases, become the medium of discourse itself through sign-language. Hands are materially useful; they convey information and they embody expressivity. They stand at a nexus between doing, discovering and feeling. Small wonder, then, that they should offer so potent a metaphor for the fusion of doing with interrogating that is integral to artistic research.

Our hands and our minds work collaboratively, but they also symbolise the two sides of a dichotomy: that of action and reflection, doing and thinking. With thinking, two extra dimensions enter the equation of human activity: one is the capacity to transcend the present, establishing a continuity from past to future; the other is the ability to take up moral or ethical positions, to discriminate between immediate gratification and what might

be right in the longer term and the larger picture. And yet, arguably this last distinction is itself a product of the hierarchical aspect of the doing/thinking dichotomy, from which the deferment of gratification acquires an automatically 'superior' moral status. Perhaps there is also a morality of touch, action and creation that needs to be more thoroughly understood and codified.

Traditionally, research has occupied almost exclusively the dimension of the mind; its ethical norms reflect this. The hybrid mind-and-body locus of artistic research raises fundamental questions, from an orthodox research standpoint, about the ethical viability of the activities in which we, as artistic researchers, engage. As artists, we learn to respond instinctively and almost instantaneously to what feels good in what we are doing and what does not. We might even speak of this in terms of what feels right and what feels wrong. As artist-researchers, we are fusing not just two fields of activity but, one might almost say, two ethical modes – those of right-thinking and right-feeling. How might contemplating the many facets of this fusion - such as those relating to instinct, sensory and tactile feedback, affective response, critical reflection, artistic and scholarly quality and research responsibility - have the potential not just to address objections of partiality from a defensive standpoint but, over and above that, to generate new insights into aspects of ethics?

An embodied ethics

Being engaged in an 'embodied ethics' of artistic research implies not just being hands on but also 'getting one's hands dirty' - a soiling of one's ethical purity. On the other hand, it can also be associated with the honesty of real toil as opposed to the abstract and disengaged sophistry of a disembodied contemplation. But either standpoint has its limitations, compounding the dichotomy between actions and ideas and, potentially,

working against the best aspects of creative endeavours. We should aim to do better. We must make a sober evaluation of what an embodied ethics might mean for artistic research practices and for their legitimacy in the spheres of both art and research. As artist-researchers, we cannot disregard the imperatives that embodiment implies: for example, the need for all the senses to be functioning as well as they can, alongside the discipline of the trained mind. There is an ethics of skills and training that places obligations on the artist, but also, when those obligations are met, confers value and trustworthiness upon their creations. This ethics, and the challenges it raises, directs us to a key question of all artistic research: what is the object upon which our hopefully finely-honed mind and senses are focussed; what is the 'real thing' that we wish to examine through our special form of 'hands-on' questioning? And if, insofar as it is embodied, it is within our own bodies as artists that this embodiment takes place, how, at moments where this is critical, do we distinguish between ourselves and the object of our research? Moreover, when this thing that is partly indivisible from us and yet necessarily discrete shows itself to us, how can we be sure that the uncanniness of this self/not-self paradox – and, for that matter, its ontological messiness – won't repel us? Even if we overcome such a reaction and, instead, find a beauty in its strangeness, is there not a danger that, being neither us nor other but a paradoxical hybrid, it might remain finitely elusive? And, finally, will we not run into problems if we start to attribute ethical qualities to its content and messages when these emanate partly from ourselves?

Self-criticism and advocacy

Such thoughts point to the need for a robustly self-critical approach. However, self-criticism itself can become a kind of 'no-go area' for artistic research when the need to compete with longer-established disciplines for limited resources is never far from the thoughts of its

proponents. Such precariousness can make us, as a discipline, fearful and defensive. Do we dare to voice opinions that might be used against us as arguments to limit our expansion? If not, what will our pusillanimity do for the artmaking – or for a supposedly fearless truth-oriented research? And can we artist-researchers really argue for any kind of relevance, any 'public face' at all, if we attempt to exempt our field from what might be seen as over-zealous self-criticism?

This dilemma has a topical and politicised dimension. Despite our positing a highly demanding role for art and for the artists who work as researchers in their art, in today's climate any call for a critical revolution emanating from within artistic research itself risks being seen as a yet another attack on the former sanctity and autonomy of traditional academic virtues. Despite having the opposite intention, it could give ammunition to the move in higher education from learning and research being cherished as endeavours of intrinsic worth to their being evaluated according to business models with their fixation upon productivity, efficiency and other merits that are more easily comprehended in the public sphere. How are we to counter such concerns amongst our own community while engaging constructively with these external pressures?

In my view, we must turn to artistic research work itself by making trenchant evaluations of its claims: Does the apparatus of any given piece of artistic research 'work' in research terms, without compromising the essential nature of the artwork - or ideally, while enhancing that work? Does it meet the demands of its valorising institutions without, in the process, being enslaved by them and becoming a doppelgänger entity – a hands-off 'thing' that is not arts-based? And through what means are the research objectives and findings of the project made tangible for those outside the core discipline of the art-making? A viable,

ethically-lively artistic research project would answer all these requirements while, significantly, showing us the journey of the art-making and its potential for transformation of the field, which may be wondrous to some and somewhat crazy to others.

This brings us back to the points concerning research advocacy that I introduced earlier. Initial attempts by pioneers within the artistic research field (among whom I feel privileged to count myself) to answer questions concerning 'quality' were inevitably coloured by our desire to help the field prosper: we became advocates, staunch in the belief that artmaking and artworks, whether newly-minted or reimagined, 'have a property of meaning which gives them the capacity to expand or enhance knowledge, insight or understanding'.[5]

In practice, this has meant that advocacy for artistic research is characterised by two orders of activity: that which is undertaken by the artist 'in-and-through' the making of an artwork – the 'hands-on' - and that which is concerned with defending these collective activities as examples of legitimate research – the 'hands-off' - a process which may, or may not, be carried out through argumentation by artists, but is often the domain of theorists. Artist-researchers who name themselves as such would probably understand that the making of art has variability in terms of its potential to carry research content and to serve as a mode of advocacy.

> It therefore follows that, for an artistic researcher, a musical performance – for example - will be persuasive, within the terms of artistic research, insofar as it not only carries and conveys musical meaning but, in so doing, enhances knowledge, insight and understanding — no matter how hard it may be to pin down the precise nature of these terms.[6]

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5 Jeremy Cox and Darla Crispin. 2013. 'Allotropes of Advocacy: A Model for Categorising Persuasiveness in Musical Performance', in *Music + Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

6 Ibid.

Whose advocacy? – public education and personal development

The advocacy of a position is part of the 'public face' of artistic research, something that is needed if it is to establish its socially-relevant credentials. When the term is used in a legal context, 'advocacy carries connotations both of marshalling arguments effectively, highlighting the strongest and playing down the weakest, and of delivering them charismatically, using eloquence and rhetorical impact'.[7] Yet, one of the most intriguing forms of advocacy for the arts – and arguably for artistic research, occurs when the artist appears to act *against* the nature of the art being made. For example, Glenn Gould's gesture of abandoning 'live' performance, of taking a 'hands-off' approach to the 'live' music arena, might well have sounded the death-knell of his art; instead, it created the only possible conditions for his innovative work, in that it enabled him to transform himself exclusively into the identity of a studio recording artist. Another instance of advocacy via the apparently destructive act of taking hands off is the notorious case of the artist Banksy's October 2018 auction of the painting, 'Girl with Balloon', which was partially – and publicly – shredded immediately after its sale at Sotheby's for 1.3 million US dollars.[8] The twist here is that what is apparently being put forward as the subject matter for consideration – 'what's at stake' - is immediately transformed: in this case, the apparent gentrification of 'street art' is exposed as a kind of exploitative, money-making scam. Interestingly, the destroyed work was not thereby necessarily deemed to have had its monetary value diminished!

Both these cases are examples that invite reflection on ethical questions in which the art-identity is intimately tied in with the artist's personal answer to an ethical dilemma. Indeed, the trope of artists destroying their own work, of washing their hands of it, is a common

7 Ibid.

8 See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-45770028

one, and, as a strategy for startling us into rethinking what the function of art might be in the public sphere, it retains its critical power. So, the advocacy of ideas around art through art has many facets and a variety of practices. But there are hazards, the most obvious of which is noted by Mick Wilson in his contribution, 'Discipline Problems and the Ethos of Research', to the *SHARE Handbook for Artistic Research Education*. Concerning the functioning of artistic research in the public sphere, he writes:

> …an ethos of research is that of seeking an alteration in shared knowledges, understandings and values. It entails a 'readiness' to undergo a change in thinking knowing, understanding, believing, positioning or value, based on considered reflection on experience in the world. This is not just about 'being open' or even 'actively open', but systematically active in seeking to open out an alteration in shared understandings. Importantly, this formulation speaks of shared understandings and underlines the need for inter-subjective dialogue and exchange in the research process. This cannot be reduced to an ethos of self-improvement and self-reflection. It is, fundamentally, a relational ethos, positing a dynamic interaction with the world and others…[9]

And, in case we needed further clarification on the last point, he offers it:

> Positing the ethos of research as a matter of self-fashioning and subject-formation must carefully negotiate the risk of inadvertently fostering a culture of narcissistic self-reflection and uncritical valorisation of artistic selfhood.[10]

Wilson's points are trenchantly made here, but they merit our attention in this arena of the 'hands on' nature of artistic research and its questions, and the way that this fusion of observer and observed exerts a pull towards the subjective. While self-reflexivity can open up research to new kinds of conceptualisations, and researchers to new challenges, it is also risky: even its better manifestations will be dismissed generically by some, while poor examples will only serve to reinforce latent prejudices about its inability to measure up to a dominant perception of what research should be. At the core of what is at stake, however, is

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9 Mick Wilson and Schelte van Ruiten, eds, 'The SHARE Handbook for Artistic Research Education', accessible at http://www.sharenetwork.eu/resources/share-handbook, 214.

10 Ibid., 215.

an insight into a principal area of potential in the argument for artistic research as having epistemic significance: that reflection itself, as a disciplined practice which also has a potential for artistic expressivity, may become a conduit for particular kinds of research knowledge that cannot not be generated through other means.

One may also argue that it is this area that allows the most vivid access to the world-view of the artist from outside the process, thus making it the most viable for research dissemination. Here, however, theory and practice are not always in alignment, since while, in principle, reflection may offer insights of the kind suggested, their dissemination comes down to questions of language. The message may be of the highest value, but it can all too easily be compromised by the medium through which the messenger – the artist him- or herself – is obliged to express it. This means that we need the utmost clarity about the nature of the communicator and that which is being communicated. As artist researchers, we must not only be the best artists and best researchers we can be but also the best communicators of our own insights. As advocates for our own work, we must think about the prior knowledge and contextual reference points that our audiences may have. This means being able to communicate effectively to lay persons; but it also implies a stronger, wider and better-connected approach amongst ourselves as a community of artistic researchers.

Developing ourselves and developing the field

For artistic research to develop further as a discipline, it is essential that most, if not all, of its projects build upon earlier work, not just that of each individual researcher but also of others within the field. Correspondingly, an artistic research project in which it is possible to see how others might take up its findings and use them in their own work should surely have

an edge over one where this is not the case. Indeed, as an adjunct to this, it is becoming a matter of increasing urgency that artistic researchers systematically log their projects within the dedicated databases that are beginning to become available, so that others may access information as to pre-existing research in the same way as happens with scientific research - whether in music or in other disciplines.[11]

There is an important point to make in relation to this issue of knowledge-sharing and its public face. An aspect of how conventional research proceeds by building upon earlier results is that it relies upon the replicability of these. Replicability in artistic research is a less straightforward issue; the personal nature of artistic activity means that, to some extent, each example of artistic research is *sui generis* and uniquely inflected according to the personality of the individual carrying it out. This, in turn, means that knowledge-sharing in the form of building successively upon earlier results must be undertaken obliquely, each new iteration taking on its own unique inflection. It may be thought that this invalidates the very notion of such sharing; on the contrary, it merely represents one of the ways in which artistic research, whilst being a species of research, need not conform slavishly in every respect to the characteristics of research in other fields. Although, in order to earn the label 'research', artistic research must adhere in most respects to generic norms of research practice, it is equally vital that it be allowed to grow on its own terms and in those ways that best enable it to be a valuable contributor, both to artistic practice and artistic knowledge.

[11] One of the principal conduits for online artistic research work is the Research Catalogue in which essays such as the present one are increasingly being housed – https://www.researchcatalogue.net – and which also hosts a number of publications on artistic research and other research in the arts, including the *Journal for Artistic Research: JAR,* (https://www.jar-online.net), *Ruukku: Studies in Artistic Research,* (http://ruukku-journal.fi), the *Journal of Sonic Studies* (https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/558606/558607) and *VIS – Nordic Journal for Artistic Research* (https://www.visjournal.nu).

To underline this last point, and to pick up upon an earlier observation, we might consider critical reflection in artistic research as occupying a spectrum of possibilities, and even as being imbued with an element of style. Flexible modelling of this kind can be helpful in both the development and the analysis of reflective practices, in that the modes of discourse can be tailored to illuminate the essential nature of each specific artistic research instantiation. Achieving this may generate work that is viable in both the artistic AND artistic research arenas, ensuring that doubts about which 'ethos' is applicable may be quelled, at least in part.

An important aspect of how our work is apprehended is the medium through which it is transmitted. Artistic research has long struggled with this, sitting uncomfortably between the poles of pure artistic production and the conventional scholarly article. It might be said that, lacking its own 'ecology' of dissemination networks, it has had to parasitise upon those already in existence, whether scholarly or artistic. An important attempt to address this came a few years ago in the form of the Research Catalogue (RC) – the same online resource upon which this essay and its companion pieces have been published. Created and supported by the Society for Artistic Research (SAR), the RC, although it continues to host examples of through-written documents such as the present one, has primarily attempted to break out of the essay/article format and take as its frame of reference the exposition. The idea is that it should be a space where artworks can be curated and exhibited alongside expository material that gives them context, divulges their more esoteric meanings and imposes a 'meta-meaning' generated by the particular curatorial approach that is taken. An RC exposition can present finished material, but it can also document process and offer open-ended self-appraisals as to where the work stands, what it signifies and where it might lead. Despite its ongoing limitations in terms of user-friendliness, the RC offers an indication

of where the future of a truly discipline-specific dissemination platform for artistic research might lie.

Of course, any such platform can never connect totally seamlessly with the work it presents. It remains to some extent a *post hoc* rationalisation of the 'messiness of doing', which this essay acknowledges in its very title. What the artist-researcher 'knows' in the execution of her artistic research is volatile, malleable and contingent; bringing it to an audience can only ever partially capture the metamorphic exhilaration and risk that accompanies this kind of knowledge. Aspects of the knowledge that are generated in 'real time' will inevitably be lost within the curatorial process. They will fall through the gap between doing and knowing which the exposition, literally, 'exposes'. But this gap, both rhetorical and physical, may be precisely where much of the most poignant artistic research content lies, and I believe it is close to the essence of what we seek when we argue for the particularities of what is at stake in artistic research. The irony is that we can never fully grasp this; yet, that sense of a gap can sometimes be precisely what creates the most vivid sense of meaning, of value and of something being at stake.

Value in art and ethics

At this point, then, we have gone far beyond Mick Wilson's deriding of 'narcissistic self-reflection and uncritical valorisation of artistic selfhood' toward a communication that seeks to be specific, vivid and empathic, and which concerns itself with the ethical potential of artistic research. Art can carry within it the 'stuff', the material, of the ethical, not necessarily by taking an obvious position but through how that material manifests itself in terms of its inescapable historicity. As Mary Warnock writes:

> To teach a child the difference between a shoddy and a creditable performance, as an actor, a singer or an instrumentalist, as a painter or a potter, is to introduce him [or

her] to values that are, like ethical values, superficially changing, but fundamentally timeless and capable of being shared…[12]

We might take issue with Warnock around the question of power relations in terms of who pronounces upon that which is 'shoddy' or 'creditable', but we already know that one of the most important things that is occurring as artistic research is being developed and valorised is the emergence of a community of *peers*; it is this still very young community that must take up questions of 'shoddiness' or 'creditworthiness' in the face of external doubts, not just about the value of artistic research itself but about 'expertise' in general. Far from merely preserving expertise as a means of protecting old privilege, artistic research may well be offering its own conceptions of knowledge, skill and painstakingly acquired wisdom as a *radical* move against current political tendencies, thereby adding an extra layer of necessity to the act of giving a public account of itself.

The other point raised by Warnock concerns the value of sharing ideas and of creating the capacity to do so – which is important for us, since knowledge-sharing is a marker for research content. This capability relates to yet another quality that is needful in defence of our frail humanity, and that is the capacity for humans to be linked together by sympathetic, even empathic, understanding that need not constitute full agreement. As artists, we may be uniquely well-placed to remind society of something that, crucially, is a wellspring for creative imagination: our ability to 'think and speak of that which is not in front of our eyes'.[13]

Conclusion – a cyclical ethics at a critical moment

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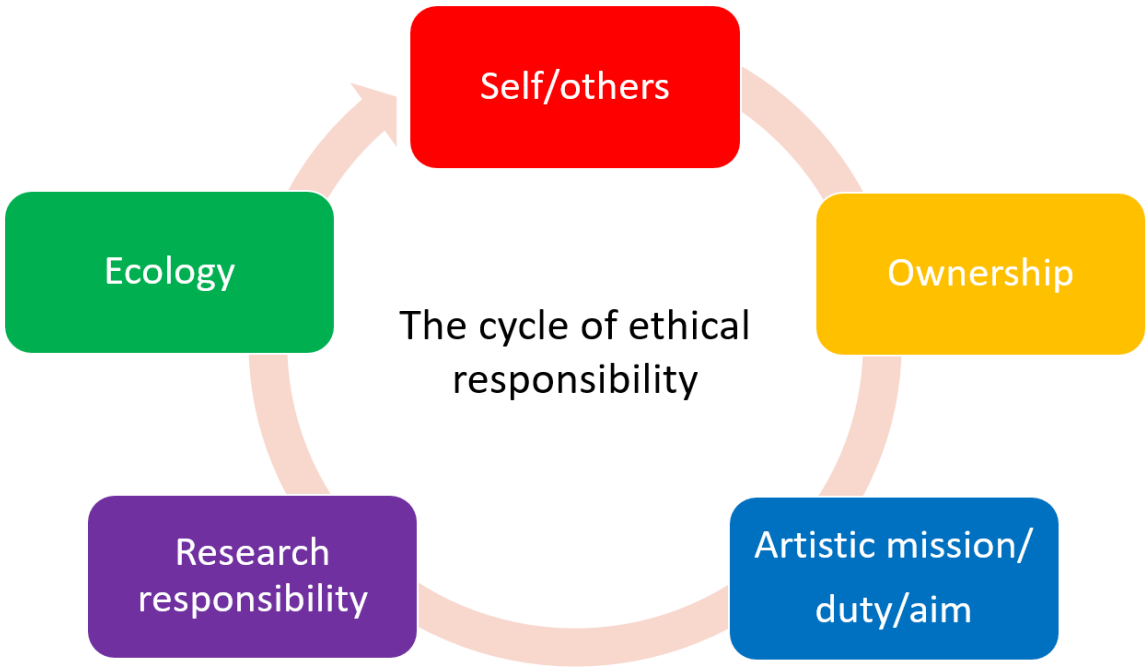
12 Mary Warnock. 2006. *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics.* (London: Duckworth Overlook), p. 196.

13 Ibid., p. 135.

Drawing together the strands of this 'working sketch of the current situation', it may be helpful to think of all the foregoing as something that could be represented as a cycle. Artistic research begins in and with ***ourselves***; we have to take ***ownership*** of both its creative and its self-critical aspects; we have to be clear why we are doing what we do, what our ***mission*** is; we need to evaluate what is at stake, balancing risk with ***responsibility***; and we need to situate our activity within an ***ecology*** for which we ourselves must take a certain responsibility in terms of its maintenance and growth. Finally, in locating ourselves within such an ecology, we also establish a relationship between ourselves and our community – we share, we learn, we re-absorb from ***others*** into our creative and scholarly selves. And so, the cycle begins once more. Once again, a diagram may help to illustrate this:



This model extends only to the boundaries of its own ecology; in other respects, it is hermetic. But, as we know only too well, the world of research and the world at large impinge upon one another in a whole variety of ways, some positive and some less so. Artistic research works dynamically with the materials that impact upon its domain, not

through an unquestioning acceptance of those qualities which I have discussed but through a committed and engaged interrogation of them. Perhaps the final ethical imperative is to take that engaged interrogation proactively into the outside world. At a time when global politics appear to be moving in a completely different direction, artistic research proposes the 'reconsideration' and possible 'remaking' of expertise – quite a different thing from the discarding of expert opinion that some politicians –notably one of the leading proponents of the campaign that led to the UK's 'Brexit' from the EU – have argued for in recent years.[14]

And artistic research offers yet more: the development of a capacity to create structures of attention that enable a species of understanding which is simultaneously empathic and yet appropriately critical, along with the notion that these two need not be seen as polar opposites, but as two manifestations of the same thing. In a world of factions, antagonisms and wilful mutual non-comprehension, such an integration of the critical and the empathic is sorely needed. This, I believe, is the crux of the current 'critical moment' for artistic research in the public sphere, here and now. Whether we rise to it or falter when it matters most is the great challenge for us all – a challenge that is both creative and intellectual but, perhaps above all, ethical.

***A Postscript**: In the opening months of 2020, during the editorial phase of work on this essay, the Coronavirus pandemic took hold, closing down global infrastructures, halting commerce and impeding the execution of all kinds of projects, including those in the academic domain. The measures taken by governments to control the virus have impacted almost every aspect*

[14] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGgiGtJk7MA

of our lives, mentally as well as physically; how we think about artistic research, and how we attempt to practise it, is no exception. Being an artist-researcher in times of social distancing, remote working and injunctions to practise frequent and thorough hand-washing adds a pointedly consequential dimension to musings about 'the messiness of doing'.

What a 'hands-on', embodied artistic research will look like in the wake of the pandemic is a small, highly specialised but, for artist-researchers, crucial component of the search that is beginning for a 'new normal'. Already, the debates about how we may need to re-shape our entire lives are embracing ethical issues: issues about whose work is most valuable to society, how social inequality affects vulnerability to infection, how our material profligacy compromises the environment in ways that may come back to bite us, and much more. As the new landscape begins to emerge, artistic research will need to take cognisance of these debates, as well as continuing to pursue its own ethical questioning.

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Diku: Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education – link to the Artistic Research Programme: https://diku.no/en/programmes?theme%5B%5D=Artistic%20research

The Research Catalogue – an international database for artistic research: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/portal