

# On the Essayistic Science of Artistic Research

*an un-methodological method to art education*

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Dear members of the committee,

In this writing I would like to motivate my application to the 'Master Education in Arts' at the Piet Zwart Academy, and briefly explain how I came to be interested in the field of education and what my main research interest is.

In the relatively new field of Artistic Research, science and art are combined. But, what methods can the artistic researcher use? How can we combine a scientific and artistic working method? I would like to investigate if and how essayistic science<sup>1</sup> could be used un-methodological method<sup>2</sup> in the field of art and Artistic Research. The essay is aimed at combining the scientific and the artistic. It follows a train of thought, and reflects on those thoughts. The essay as an approach can be applied to multiple artistic mediums; video-essay; photo-essay; and in my current thesis I investigate the essayistic performance (below you with two paragraphs of my MA thesis Artistic Research) I would like to investigate how the essayistic attempt and the essayistic experiment could function as an artistic methodology.

**PER-FORM** the essayistic performance and the performative essay

link: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/270728/270729>

## Relevance of the essay for Artistic Research

This research (my MA thesis) is aimed at investigating the performative essay and the essayistic performance, an underlying motivation in my interest in theory and art as merged in the essay form. The focus of the essay is not just aimed at the content but also in the manner of presentation, the form. Form and content are conceptually bound to each other in the essay form. I chose specifically for the master Artistic Research of the University of Amsterdam because they aim to combine theory and art practice in an academic setting. From my artistic practice, it is my decision to investigate how the essay can function as an approach<sup>3</sup> which can be used for performance. But at the base of this question is understanding how theory and art are present in the essay form. The relatively new field of Artistic Research could be the perfect place where artistic practice and theoretical research can come closer together, and maybe where the essay can reach its full potential. Therefore, this research is also an attempt to investigate the essay (and essayistic science) as possible methodological foundation for the field of Artistic Research. From this foundation the essay could take shape in a variety of artistic forms.

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<sup>1</sup> Burgard names it "essaying science" Burgard, *Adorno, Goethe, and the Politics of the Essay*, (1992) p. 183-187

<sup>2</sup> Adorno names it "methodically unmethodically" Adorno, *The Essay as Form* (1958, trans. Nullot-Kentor and Will 1984) p. 161

<sup>3</sup> I use the word approach because procedure or modus would be too rigid to describe the essay and "sprit" as Obaldia describes it is too esoteric, it implies a character without body, or form. Approach is more neutral and implies a gesture and movement, an action of attempting to come closer to the object at hand. Adorno names it an "un-methodological method" this is perhaps the best way to describe it, as a meta-method, but both the word meta as the word method have a heavier connotation than the word approach.

## The essayistic Science of Artistic Research

The essay balances between art and science, but why exactly? Historically science and art have been separated, nowadays there is a clear distinction between the two realms. Science needs to articulate its sources, its relevance, its context, and provide clear argumentations. Furthermore it is strictly bound to academic and ethical rules. Art is not constraint by these rules, it can be free in its acts and motives, its sources can be eclectic and don't have to be revealed — maybe this is the only difference between art and Artistic Research, that the artistic researcher does have to reveal its sources, motivations and work process — . Adorno says that the essay is neither scientific nor artistic; „Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done”.<sup>4</sup> The essay adopts the freedom of interpretation and emphasizes the importance of presentation (aesthetics) form art. The way content is presented says something about how we must to read it. John Snyder describes: “ the essay (...) becomes pure essayism, the "arts" of metaphysics, ethics, and even science as they can be "played" by (self-reflective<sup>5</sup>) discursivity.”<sup>6</sup> So science can be essayed, but that doesn't make art science, or science artistic. If science follows different rules as art, what would happen if science follows the artistic un-rules of the essay? Then we get an essayistic science like Goethe: a freedom of experimenting that doesn't want to find confirmation but to truly test the object of investigation, and to try and find connections and reactions. The aim is not to make science out of art or art out of science, but rather let the different modes interact with each other. New insights and views can be discovered, but the initial intent of the essayistic science is not to justify, conclude nor proof anything, but to find.

If the essay can be considered as a free form of science (essayistic science), maybe Artistic Research, could use the essay as an approach (or a way of) making artistic works. The artist researcher that approaches the object(s) of investigation essayistically. The aim of the institutionalized field of Artistic Research is to combine the scientific and the artistic. Though we can not make art of science or vice versa, both the essay as Artistic Research are in the borderland between these two realms. The relatively new field of Artistic Research could thus be a place where art and science can come closer together, and maybe where the essay can reach its full potential. It could break with the notion of assumed organized and rational science, and the romanticized irrational art. This artistic researcher chooses the object of investigation freely and attempts to find different ways of viewing the object of investigation. The aim is not to find conclusions or truth for that matter, but to experiment and to test. It ignores the need for structured, linear and manner of investigation and presentation. It refuses to deduct and explain, and therefore leaves room for interpretation. The investigation goes hand in hand with its form of presentation, where the conceptual, the visual, and the aesthetic, have an essential role. Both theory and experience are incorporated as equal partners, it follows a train of thought. The approach allows playful and impulsive elements, letting experience enter, but also keeping a firm grip on the theoretical. Its attitude is relentless, focussed, and regardless of audience. At every moment it should reflect on itself and criticize itself.

With kind regards,

Emily

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<sup>4</sup> Adorno, *The Essay as Form* (1958, trans. Nullot-Kentor and Will 1984) p. 152

<sup>5</sup> Snyder, *Prospects Of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay, and the Theory of Genre* (1991) p.159

<sup>6</sup> Snyder, *Prospects Of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay, and the Theory of Genre* (1991) p.201