

Artistic Research and/as the *Third Space*? (!)

Introduction

The title of my presentation is “Artistic Research and/as the *Third Space*? (!)”
First thing to say: I intentionally put a question mark because what I would like to do with you today is to reflect on the question what it is or what it might be that makes this approach to research a ‘special methodology’ and how this approach negotiates the relationship between artistic practice and research. Secondly, I am referring to PaR as Artistic Research (we can maybe later talk about the distinctions between the two). Third, I will soon say something about the notion of third space as that space between and beyond artistic practice and academic research).

If the production of knowledge is a core task of artistic research, then what kinds of knowledge, what modes of knowing are we talking about? Is Artistic Research indeed a ‘specific methodology’ (as it is mentioned in the CFP) or is it rather a *field* with a growing number of players, participants, actors who are all developing their own methods of research, their own approach to research in and through their artistic medium? Or is it a field where similar approaches come together to be shared, discussed, reflected and contested?

What are the epistemological grounds of this field? Is there an epistemological framework that defines the boundaries of this field? What are the philosophical grounds for this new epistemological framework? Are these grounds stable and fixed or are they constantly shifting and changing depending on the specific needs of the modality through which the subject of research is approached? Is artistic indeed about the production of knowledge, as we start to take for granted, or does Henk Borgdorff have a point when he writes, that artistic research is not so much a matter of *formal* knowledge production, but rather a mode of ‘unfinished thinking’ and ‘unfinished reflection’.

What I would like to do in this presentation is to share with you some material that I have been working on in the last couple of days, months and years, in order to provide some food for thought, reflection and discussion.

The presentation is structured in 4 parts. First, I will give a very short introduction into the subject and the background of my artistic research project (15 mins). In the second part I will present some ideas about the notion of 'reflection' (15). In the 3rd part I invite you to take a look at research material that I put out in the space while at the same time I perform a research practice (15 mins). And in the last part (15 minutes) we have time to discuss our thoughts and observations.

About my research and its background

My doctoral research investigates the impact of Body Weather performance training on the body of the performer and explores the potential of this artistic training practice as a medium of research.

- ➔ What is the bodily knowledge that is created, embedded and enacted in the training?
- ➔ How does the training alter the performers perceptual process?
- ➔ What insights can be gained from observing and reflecting on the process of alteration?
- ➔ How to relate these insights into current debates and discourses at the intersection of Philosophy, Cognitive Science and Artistic Research?

What is Body Weather?

- ➔ Short description (What? When? Who? How is it developed?)

What are the Manipulations?

- ➔ Demo MP No.1
 - ➔ Summarize the key points of attention
 - ➔ research score!
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In my conception of this practice, the aim of the Manipulations as performance training ‘method’ is to create an epistemically open and receptive body that is available to move from an altered mode of perception, and to enhance the body’s *affectability*. The objectives of my investigation are to analyze and describe in detail the impact of the Manipulations on the performer/practitioner, to articulate the tacit knowledge that is created, how this knowledge is embodied and enacted in and through this practice, and to further explore its potential as a medium of research

➔ Transformation of ‘reflection’: reflection is expanded from a method for gaining a deeper understanding of the artistic practice into a medium of reflecting on concepts that are made available by discourses that are beyond the realm of the Manipulations as an artistic practice.

➔ Expanding the scope and mode of reflection from practice-immanent to practice-transcendent, from *intra*-disciplinary to trans-disciplinary, from reflectively objectifying subjective experience to a trans-subjective mode of embodied reflection. [...]

On Reflection

➔ This question about the nature and the kind of reflection has been in the focus of my more recent research activity and led me to look more into the notion of ‘reflection’

➔ I want to look more into this question: I propose to reflect on the notion of reflection

➔ What are the specific modes of reflection in artistic research? Do they differ from reflection *in* artistic practice or *on* and *about* artistic practice? How do these modes of reflection differ from academic modes of reflection? Can we consider these modes of reflection as something of their own kind? Are they an addition of artistic and academic modes of reflection? Or is it a distinctive mode of reflection that goes beyond the conventions of both domains?

➔ These questions made me revisit some old and research some new materials that I would like to briefly introduce you.

E. Grosz, 2001. Architecture from the Outside. Essays on Virtual and Real Space

But first I want to start with Elizabeth Grosz and get back to her notion of the *third* space. The aim of Grosz is to bring two disciplines, architecture and philosophy, into a non-hierarchical relationship with each other. Grosz argues that this requires creating a *third* space, a space from where both disciplines can be approached without submitting one to the other, a space, thus, from where both disciplines are treated as equivalent discourses and on equal levels. This *third* space, or the outside, as Grosz calls it, is a place that doesn't yet exist. It is a joyful place that allows one "to see what cannot be seen from the inside, removed from the immediacy of immersion that affords no distance." (viii) This privilege of the *outside* as the place from where one can see what remains *unseen* from the perspective of the *inside*, comes with a loss and with a gain: "Something is lost – the immediate intimacy of an inside position; and something is gained – the ability to critically evaluate that position and to possibly compare it with others." (viii)

Does this sound somewhat familiar to you when we think of the relationship between artistic practice and academic research?

➔ *equal relationship between artistic practice and academic research requires the creation of a **third** space outside both the domain of art and academia*

The next concept that I want to throw in is by Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, 2007: **Embodied Reflection and the Epistemology of Reflective Practice**. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, **41 (3), 395-408**.

Building on the work of Donald Schön and his ideas about the *reflective practitioner* (1983), Kinsella develops the notion of *embodied reflection*. Embodied reflection, she writes "arises through the bodily, lived experience of the practitioner and is revealed in action." (396) How does she arrive at this definition? By investigating the philosophical influences of two philosophers on Schön: Michael Polanyi and Gilbert Ryle.

Now I will only look at her account of the influence by Polanyi on Schön, and leave out Ryle. (Ryle is important for his distinction between knowing how and knowing that)

Polanyi is important for Schön, because of his concept of tacit knowledge, developed in his book "The tacit dimension" (1967). Tacit knowledge, Polanyi argues, is tacitly structuring not only how we *perceive* the world, but it is actually also a way of *making*

the world. Practitioners have always theories that are tacitly structuring their actions, whether they are aware of it or not; these theories are revealed in the practitioner's behaviour.

For Schön, Kinsella writes, the crucial task for the practitioner is to become aware of these tacit structures, or *frames*, as Schön also calls them. Practitioners need to reflect on their tacit frames in order to become able to choose amongst a variety of available frames. (this sounds familiar to dancers, right?)

So reflection on action is a method of creating awareness about the tacit frames that structure our actions and behaviour.

Now, Schön criticizes Polanyi and says that it is not always *possible* to make tacit knowledge explicit simply by shifting the focus of attention and observation. And even *if* the practitioner is becoming aware of tacit frames and succeeds to make an explicit description, the descriptions of tacit-knowing-in-action remain always *constructions*. And as constructions, Kinsella writes following Schön, "such interpretations are partial and represent attempts to impose stasis on the dynamic process of knowing-in-action." (401)

In other words, according to Kinsella, for Schön any attempt to *produce* knowledge by reflecting on the tacit content of an experience and to make this tacit explicit is always in a way a *construction* of knowledge.

So for the record: for Kinsella, who follows Schön, embodied reflection is a method of creating awareness about the tacit frames underlying our actions and by making these tacit frames descriptively explicit knowledge is constructed. Constructing Knowledge.

Zahavi, D., 2015. Phenomenology of Reflection. In: Staiti, A., ed. *Commentary on Husserl's Ideas 1*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 177-193.

This notion of knowledge as being constructed through embodied reflection is not so far away from another conception of reflection, and that is the notion of reflection as a *transformation*.

In the text *Phenomenology of Reflection*¹, Dan Zahavi (2015) analyzes how E. Husserl developed his notion of *reflection as transformation* at the beginning of the 20th century. According to Zahavi, Phenomenology faces a methodological problem when it comes to the question of how experiential subjectivity can be made accessible to direct examination.

Zahavi summarizes the problem as follows:

“Does reflection give us access to the original experiential dimension or is there, on the contrary, reason to suspect that the experiences are changed radically when they are reflected upon? Is reflection, in reality, a kind of falsifying mirror or telescope that transforms whatever it makes appear?” (184)

➔ *In other words: what is it that happens to experience when we reflect on it? Is experience mirrored or distorted? What is it that we come to know when we are reflecting on experience?*

According to Zahavi, Husserl’s solution to the problem is a middle path between reflection as mirroring and reflection as distorting. For Husserl, reflection *modifies* and *transforms* the experience reflected upon. And therefore, it is the task of Phenomenology to systematically investigate the impact of reflection on the experience that is reflected upon. In other words, phenomenological reflection for Husserl is the reflecting on reflection: it is *meta-reflection*. (186/187)

For Husserl, Zahavi writes, it is not a problem that reflection transforms and alters experience. Rather to the contrary, the whole point of reflection and its cognitive value is precisely this: *transformation* and *alteration* - otherwise there would be no need for reflection. Reflection does not distort the components and structures of the experiences reflected upon, but reflection, at its best, discloses, accentuates, explicates and articulates those components and structures that are already inherent in lived experience so that they can appear even more clearly to us. (187)

Now, somewhat similar to Schön, who said that not all tacit frames can be made explicit by shifting our awareness, also in Husserl we can find the idea that not everything that we experience pre-reflectively can enter our consciousness simply by shifting our attention.

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Reflection cannot ever *fully* grasp the pre-reflective content of an experience (188, footnote 2), but it will always remain incomplete and open-ended.

Again for the record: For Zahavi, following Husserl, the cognitive value of reflection is its transformative power, and at its best reflection discloses, accentuates, explicates and articulates the structure of experiences in a necessarily incomplete and open-ended way; it reveals the world to us.

The notion of the open-endedness links with H. Borgdorff's notion of artistic research as a mode of 'unfinished thinking'.

4. Borgdorff, H., 2010. The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research. In: Biggs, M. and Karlsson, H., eds. *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, London: Routledge, 44-63.

For H. Borgdorff, the articulation of the pre-reflective and non-conceptual content that is enclosed in artworks and art practices is one of the core tasks of artistic research. Somewhat surprisingly though – considering the title of his essay -, he argues that this articulation should not be understood in the usual sense as a formal mode of *knowledge production*, but as a mode of 'unfinished thinking'. He writes that

“artistic research seeks not so much to make explicit the knowledge that art is said to produce, but rather to provide a specific articulation of the pre-reflective, non-conceptual content of art. [Art] thereby invites 'unfinished thinking'. Hence it is not formal knowledge that is the subject matter of artistic research, but thinking in, through and with art.” (44)

One of the crucial questions of artistic research, according to Borgdorff, is the problem of articulating the pre-reflective knowledge, non-conceptual content that is embodied in art practice and artistic products. He identifies two different perspectives on this problem:

“Some argue that artistic research targets these non-conceptual forms of knowledge and understanding, which emerge in and through the creation of art, without wanting or being able to explicate them further. Others feel that it seeks to give explicit discursive (that is, verbal) expression to the knowledge that is embodied and enacted in works and practices of art.” (59)

The two different perspectives revolve around a question that has been at the heart of the debate about artistic research from the very beginning, Borgdorff explains. That question is whether there is

“an essentially non-conceptual, and hence non-discursive, content in artistic research? Or is a smooth transition conceivable between pre-reflective forms of knowledge and experience and their linguistic-conceptual translation or conversion within the space of reason? [...] Is it possible to achieve a linguistic-conceptual articulation of the embedded, enacted and embodied content of artistic research?” (60)

For Borgdorff, as I read him, it seems to be possible, indeed, to articulate the non-conceptual content to a certain extent, but by nature this content cannot be defined. It is precisely this undefined nature of the non-conceptual content of art that sets our thinking into motion and that invites us to *unfinished reflection*, he writes. Artistic research, he writes, is the acceptance of this invitation:

“Artistic research is the deliberate articulation of such unfinished thinking. It reinforces the contingent perspectives and world disclosures which art imparts. Artistic research therefore does not really involve theory building or knowledge production in the usual sense of those terms. Its primary importance lies not in explicating the implicit or non-implicit knowledge enclosed in art. It is more directed at a not-knowing, or a not-yet-knowing. It creates room for that which is unthought, that which is unexpected – the idea that all things could be different. Especially pertinent to artistic research is the realization that we do not yet know what we do not know. Art invites us to linger at the frontier of what there is, and it gives us an outlook on what might be. Artistic research is the deliberate articulation of these contingent perspectives.” (61)

To sum up: *Artistic research is less a matter of formal knowledge production, than of unfinished thinking that aims at a specific articulation of the pre-reflective, non-conceptual content enacted in artistic processes and embedded in artistic products.*

The last piece of writing that I want to introduce is a text by **Karen Barad (2003)**. **Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter**. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (3), 801-831.

I have read this text only recently, but I have an intuition that it opens up a radically new (for me) and different perspective on a possible epistemological framework for artistic research. In this text, Barad launches a fundamental critique of representationalism and develops the concept of a posthumanist performativity, or what she calls 'agential realism'.

"Language has been granted too much power", she writes. "Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter." (802)

This critique from 2003 has to be read against a then prevailing discourse of social constructivism according to which culture is discursively inscribed on and into the body, and in which matter is merely passively waiting for its discursive inscription and with no agency in itself whatsoever.

Barad proposes a performative account that contests what she calls "the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more importance in our ontologies than they deserve." (802)

To give you an example, and to stay in our register of problems, the issue of knowledge production: In the representationalist system of scientific knowledge-making, Barad explains, there is a triangular relationship between a knowing/representing subject, a known/represented object, and a representation, knowledge, that is created in the relationship between the knower and the known. Representation then, is a system of mediation between two supposedly separate entities, postulating an ontological gap between a representing subject and a represented object, a word and a thing. In this epistemological framework the question is whether language adequately represents the represented object or phenomenon that is supposed to be separate from the representing subject.

The objective for Barad is: how to go beyond this representationalist epistemological framework. The alternative model that she proposes is a posthumanist account of performativity. In this account, the notion of *material discursive practices* plays an absolute key role. She writes the following about the notion of material discursive practices:

"What is needed is a robust account of the materialization of *all* bodies – 'human' and 'nonhuman' – and the material-discursive practices by which their differential constitutions

are marked. This will require an understanding of the nature of the relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena, an accounting of the ‘nonhuman’ as well as ‘human’ forms of agency, and an understanding of the precise causal nature of productive practices that takes account of the fullness of matter’s implication in its ongoing historicity.” (810)

In other words, and much more simplified: we should tell a new story that considers matter not only as an object of cultural inscription, but also as an agent that is implicated in the materialization of culture. Instead of the representationalist separation of the world into ontologically separated domains of words and things, Barad proposes an agential realist account that foregrounds matter and phenomena.

Drawing on the quantum theory model of the physicist Niels Bohr, Barad comes up with an alternative epistemological model, an agential realist model, in which there is no inherent distinction between a subject and an object, a knower and a known, and that is not a model in which objective knowledge is a result of a distance or a separation between an observing knower who stays exterior to the observed phenomenon. On an agential realist account, instead, objective knowledge is “a matter of *exteriority within (material-discursive) phenomena.*” (825, original emphasis)

“‘We’ are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity.” (828)

In other words, and to rephrase and simplify, again, what Barad writes: *The knowing subject is not outside or exterior to the known object or phenomenon, but it is itself an integral, yet separable, part of the phenomenon that it aims to understand – an exteriority-within.*

Performing the Research Score and Reading the Exposition

15 minutes

Discussion

15 minutes