

Questions for Artistic Research

Text: [Editorial Team](#) | Section: [On 'Art and Science'](#)

Summary: The upcoming debate on artistic research is beginning to take shape. This article presents the questionnaires for artists who consider themselves artistic researchers, and for scientists who draw on concepts of artistic research.

This text forms the final stage in preparation for a long-term pros-and-cons discussion on concepts of artistic research. The two previous publications — namely the [List of Journals](#) from this field and the article [Artistic Research: What is it?](#) — precede the present article. This text is for those who are already familiar with the latter article, wherein Angelika Boeck presents her understanding of artistic research and Peter Tepe selects various definitions of artistic research from specialist literature, cited in the following format: (Quote 8); the full bibliographic references can be found in the source text. w/k's core editorial team is currently in the process of structuring the upcoming debate and formulating the questions that will be posed to the participants.

Both *artists* as well as *scientists* draw on concepts of artistic research. This article focuses on two levels of understanding of artistic research. The first level, or level 1, aims to capture as fully as possible an artist's understanding of artistic research and the art forms it leads to. Accordingly, level 2 aims to outline as closely as possible a scientist's understanding of artistic research and the forms of science it leads to.

The w/k discussion will focus on levels 1 and 2. It will not, or only marginally, deal with the *institutional implementation of concepts of artistic research* as addressed in the following quote:

“Artistic research (and other variations of the term) have become oft-quoted and scrutinised keywords that have found entry into the theoretical discourse and practice of art schools, scientific institutions as well as (European) policy guidelines for culture and creative industries. They lead to the establishment of new institutes, journals, societies, subsidy programmes etc.” (Quote 1)

The w/k-series *Interfaced Institutions* deals with the institutional implementation of concepts of artistic research (and of different approaches): the first article published on this topic introduces the *Hybrid Platform* in Berlin.

Level 1: Artists consider themselves artistic researchers

Over time, many different movements, trends and styles have evolved in the arts in general and the visual arts in particular. Realism, impressionism, expressionism, constructivism, surrealism, land art and conceptual art are just some examples since the 19th century. Artists often self-identify with one of these movements: artist A considers themselves a representative of impressionism, B of expressionism, C of surrealism, D of conceptual art, etc. A similar kind of self-identification takes place if an artist considers and calls themselves an artistic researcher. “I consider myself an artistic researcher” is therefore comparable to “I consider myself a conceptual artist”, “I am a representative of artistic

research” to “I am a representative of surrealism”, etc. Each artist is free to self-identify with a certain art movement or with several movements at the same time.

Therefore, level 1 does not require a pros-and-cons discussion; the case for level 2, as we shall see, is different. Level 1 primarily requires *clarification*: the aim is to find out what exactly different artists understand by artistic research. For this purpose, we have developed the following questionnaire:

Questionnaire for artists who consider themselves artistic researchers

1. What is your understanding of artistic research? Please give a detailed description covering all aspects that you deem to be essential.
2. How long have you self-identified with the field of artistic research and which other artistic field(s) would you assign your earlier artistic works to?
3. If you rely on certain theories or methods of artistic research, what are they?
4. Which theses and arguments of these theories or methodologies of artistic research do you consider valid or fruitful?
5. Explain the significance that the two selected images of your work have for your artistic programme committed to artistic research.

Participating artists may use Angelika Boeck’s observations in *Artistic Research: What is it?* as a template to answer these five questions. *VAST Discussion, Round 1* serves as a guide for these publications; per round, we plan to publish three to five completed questionnaires. Links to further information can be added at the end of the short publication. We are using the questionnaire format in order to make it easier to compare results. Thus, over time, we can gain an indicative and reliable overview of positions of artistic research represented by artists.

w/k’s interest on level 1 is also to discover which artistic researchers might be relevant for w/k. In some cases, according to our terminology, these will be border-crossers and/or science-related artists and/or artists cooperating with scientists/engineers/companies. We will offer those artistic researchers who are relevant to the w/k programme articles in which they can describe their artistic, and in some cases also scientific, positions in further detail.

Level 2: Scientists draw on concepts of artistic research

The discussion aims to cover all manner of scientists who work with concepts of artistic research, and to examine them more closely. Currently, we see two types (we can easily add to this list if necessary): The first type essentially strives to formulate a theory that we call the *theory of artistic research*; the second regards artistic research primarily as a method, rather than a theory, and is interested above all in adopting a *methodology of artistic research* in their scientific practice.

On type 1: Some explicitly or implicitly strive to develop a theory of artistic research. Such a theory usually claims to be scientific; any exceptions should be analysed separately.

Such a theory automatically competes with comparable theories (especially other art theories): thus,

the theory of artistic research 1 can be wholly or partially criticised by its rival, theory 2, which is based on different premises, and vice versa. w/k's core editorial team would like to initiate a critical pros-and-cons discussion in which certain general cognitive criteria are brought into play, such as: are the theoretical theses in question consistent with undisputed relevant facts? Is the respective theory able to explain certain phenomena better and more convincingly than rival approaches? Is any aspect of the theoretical construction under consideration faulty? Is it possible to lend greater precision to the theses and arguments?

The definitions of artistic research quoted in the previous article show that some authors ascribe certain goals and achievements to artistic research. For the time being, we regard many of these statements as *theoretical statements* that — at least in some cases — amount to a *theory of artistic research*. Some examples:

“The research goal is to create new artworks or aesthetic processes by which the artists are researchers, or in other words: the image of the artist as researcher prevails.” (Quote 6)

“*Artistic research* could [...] be translated as *künstlerische Recherche* without losing its meaning.” (Quote 7)

“Artists research in collaboration with scientists, the research process is carried out as a team, the results take the shape of texts, images, sounds, processes. [...] Artistic research conceived in this manner combines artistic research practice with scientific research methods in a transdisciplinary way, thereby changing the social practice of research in itself.” (Quote 8)

“Artistic research seeks to contribute, in and through the production of art, not only to the artistic universe, but also to what we ‘know’ and ‘understand’.” (Quote 9)

Artistic research contributes “to the destruction of knowledge and knowledge structures; to the dismantling of established truths and boundaries. It is more about a process of unlearning, rather than a reiteration of taught knowledge” (Quote 10)

“Artistic research enables us to take a closer look at the Other in art and research — not at that what *is*, but rather at that what *could be*.” (Quote 11)

“Artistic thought and action are brilliantly suited as *instructive marginals* in the process of scientific discovery: ‘Creativity is not a prisoner of the arts’.” (Quote 12)

What is “really interesting about artistic research” is “the possibility of a research concept that does not imply scientific research, yet still meets the standards of such research (meaning the search for knowledge). (Quote 13)

On type 2: Other scientists regard artistic research (only) as a method, rather than a theory, and are

interested in applying this methodology of artistic research in their scientific practice.

In 2013, w/k's editor-in-chief Anna-Sophie Jürgens organised the conference *LaborARTorium* together with the artist Tassilo Tesche and other doctoral students at the LMU Munich, which gave rise to the anthology *LaborARTorium: Research in the realm of thought between science and art* (published 2015 by transcript). The contributions in the book explain in detail — and with reference to many concrete project ideas — what the various lectures at the conference had in common: they all discussed the *methods* of artistic research, whereby questions of theory often take a backseat. In this book artistic works, for example, are explored as a method *and* result of answering research questions.

“According to Heidelberger, the methods involved in natural sciences can be equated to the experiment procedure. Hence practice defines the method, whose character is systematic because it is target-oriented. So if we speak of research in art as a procedure borrowed from the natural sciences, then artistic activity (which can be characterised as systematic in a quasi-scientific sense of pragmatics) must also follow a conscious method derived from its own practice. As this example suggests, the method in art is formed on the basis of the artist's conceptual decision to adopt a certain approach.” [1]

In order to address both types described above, we have developed two questionnaires for scientists:

Questionnaire for representatives of type 1

1.

1. What exactly do you mean by research when you speak of artistic research?
2. Do you draw theoretical and practical consequences by defining artistic activity as research (as described above) and if so, what are they? Your response may read along the lines of: because artistic activity should be considered a form of research, then...

2.

1. If you consider artistic activity to constitute a search for knowledge of a special kind, as defined in quote 13, what exactly do you mean by 'knowledge' here?
2. What consequences do you draw from defining artistic activity as a search for knowledge as described above?

3.

1. Do you consider all or only some artists to be artistic researchers?
2. If the latter: how are artists who carry out research different to other artists?

4.

1. How does your theory of artistic research differ from other theories (especially art theories)?
2. What are the main errors made by these competing theories that you would like to avoid? What

are the main arguments against these theories?

5.

1. Which other theories (especially art theories) are germane to your theory of artistic research?
2. Which theses and arguments of these theories do you consider valid?

6.

1. What are the central issues that your theory of artistic research seeks to resolve?
2. What are the main aspects of the proposed solutions?
3. Which advances in knowledge have been made in regard to the theory of artistic research?

7.

How does your theory of artistic research relate to the Bologna Process?

8.

1. How does your theory of artistic research relate to those artists who self-identify with this genre: should it serve to justify this artistic genre or some of its variants?
2. If so, is this justification based on certain normative premises and if yes, which ones?

The questionnaire is designed to provide an easy understanding of the theories of artistic research in the most thorough, comprehensive and accurate way possible. We regard such an understanding as essential for a critical analysis that is factually productive. There is a real need for discussion regarding the theories presented on level 2: once it is clear which theses represent a certain theory of artistic research and how these are justified, the discussion along with other theoretical positions aims to find out the scientific value of the theory, its potentials and its possible cognitive deficits.

Questionnaire for representatives of type 2

1.

Describe the methods you consider to be methods of artistic research. Please give examples.

2.

How do scientists using the methodology of artistic research differ from other scientists?

3.

1. How does your methodology of artistic research differ from other approaches?
2. What are the main errors made by these competing methodologies which you would like to avoid? What are the main arguments against these concepts?

4.

1. Which other methodologies relate to your methodology of artistic research?
2. Which theses and arguments of these methodologies do you consider valid?

5.

How does your methodology of artistic research relate to the Bologna Process?

6.

1. How does your methodology of artistic research relate to those artists who self-identify with this discipline: should it serve to justify this artistic discipline or some of its variations?
2. If so, is this justification based on certain normative premises, and if yes, which ones?

The answers to the two questionnaires on level 2 will be published individually as they will be more extensive than those to the questionnaire on level 1. Links to further information can be added at the end. Our choice of the questionnaire format here was intended to make it easier to compare results. As more articles of this kind are published, the broad spectrum of theories and methodologies of artistic research will become apparent.

Regarding level 2, the upcoming discussion will go even further:

- w/k's core editorial team will confront the relevant theory or methodology of artistic research with the w/k programme in order to identify similarities and differences. This will enable us to explore the possibilities of collaborating with representatives of a theory or methodology of artistic research.
- If the responses to the questions largely clarify the position of a theory or methodology of artistic research, then in some cases the w/k editor Peter Tepe will critically examine it in the light of his "Art and Science" theory.
- Of course, the same options are available to representatives of theories of artistic research: they can critically engage with the w/k concept and Tepe's "Art and Science" theory.
- Representatives of other art theories can also join the debate.

Let us begin.

Image above the text: *artistic research questions* (2020). Illustration: Till Bödeker.

[1] Nicole Vennemann: *Performativität zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst: Das künstlerische Experiment als wissenschaftsanaloge Pragmatik*. In: Anna-Sophie Jürgens and Tassilo Tesche (eds.): *LaborARTorium. Forschung im Denkraum zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst*. Bielefeld 2015, pp. 91–104, here p. 95.

Translated by Rebecca Grundmann.
