Journal of Modern Education Review, ISSN 2155-7993, USA
February 2024, Volume 14, No. 1–2, pp. 9–15
Doi: 10.15341/jmer(2155-7993)/1–2.14.2024/002

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Research From the Arts Analysis of Its Assimilation in the Higher Educational Context

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Abstract: Artistic practices located within the academy are intended for interdisciplinary development. For these practices to do so, they must be perfectly defined within epistemic protocols and systems. This normativization allows their objective construction, evaluation, and application in different areas. The Drawing and Graphic Process Lab located at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain, is both a teaching and research experience that aims to analyze and typify these processes using drawing as a tool for the development and transference of complex thinking. This article presents this experience within the Academia, and the challenge of incorporating the art-based research into the Higher Educational context.

Key words: artistic practices, drawing, epistemology, research

1. Introduction

Over the last twenty years the configuration and transfer of knowledge in any area of research has undergone a profound change where the word and the metalanguages of each respective area make way for the image. This visual twist that is inserted in the common turn of society toward the spectacularizing of any of our experiences, has profoundly affected, almost paradigmatically, the context in which knowledge is generated, transmitted, and accumulated.

Alongside this context of spectacularizing and virtualization of our experience, our practices have developed in a society that has been in a state of systemic structural crisis since the economic crisis in 2008. This situation forces us to rethink the place that contemporary artistic practices occupy; to rethink the meaning of our practices within a vulnerable, collective, and precarious context, without ever stopping generating knowledge. Doing much with little, restructuring the relationship of our practices, but also the way in which we may transfer the knowledge that is generated. This also means to build new repertoires, new transdisciplinary relationships, and interdisciplinary work methodologies, which not only make use of the resources in the art world.

The need to do so from an academic context, from faculties and institutions that conform and promote art is pressing, both at the resource level and at that of social legitimation. Some practices that underpin our area such as exhibitions, biennials, art fairs, collections, etc. are practically unsustainable because of their high level of resource consumption. Other methods, other formats, and other repertoires both tangible and intangible are

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necessary for society to access artistic research.

When we talk about research, we always do so within an institutional framework, either within the university or within the institutions that are attached to or designed to operate as research centers. This framework is not only physical and institutional but is also subject to its own rules derived from consensus and the normativity that governs it. It is a broader framework made up of the business sector, public administrations, higher education, and non-for-profit institutions.

The importance of this normativity and its direct implementation on the taxonomy of research practices is vital in that it activates the processes of social legitimation of such practices and therefore their economic allocation, representativeness, and social use. All these aspects shape the different policies governments have towards research and define what is considered "research" and what is not. It is therefore fundamental to move closer to the most important definitions of research, development, and innovation.

2. The European Scenario

In the Spanish and European case, and we might even say internationally, the Frascati Handbook is used as the source to evaluate the Research and Development of a country, region, or area of knowledge. (The most used data collection manuals, such as the Canberra or Oslo manuals, derive from the Frascati structure).

Having very briefly defined the context of our practices, we wonder how they might apply to the field of artistic research (understanding it as academic practice inscribed within the institution by means of doctoral and master's programs with the same legitimacy as any other form of research), and what place they take in these official manuals. To do so we go back to the latest edition of Frascati's manual quoting; on the one hand:

> Research on art (studies on artistic expression) 2.66 Basic or applied research is part of most artistic studies (musicology, art history, theatrical studies, media studies, literature, etc.). Public research institutions could be involved in certain areas of research, as some relevant research infrastructures (such as libraries, archives, etc.) are often associated with artistic institutions such as museums or theatres, among others. As regards to conservation and restoration activities (if not included in the above-mentioned group), it is recommended to identify the providers of these technical services as Research and Development implementers (recruitment of researchers, publication of scientific works, etc.) (Frascati Manual, p. 69).

on the other hand, we quote Frascati again:

> Artistic expression versus research 2.67. Artistic representations are generally found excluded from Research and Development. Artistic representations do not meet the novelty criterion of Research and Development, as what they seek is a new form of expression, rather than knowledge. Also, the criterion of being reproducible (how to transfer potentially produced knowledge) is also not met. Consequently, it cannot be assumed that art schools and arts departments at universities will carry out Research and Development activities without additional evidence to support it. The existence of artists attending courses in these institutions is not relevant for the calculation of Research and Development. However, if higher education institutions grant a doctorate degree to an artist as a result of his artistic representations it would have to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The recommendation is to adopt an "institutional" approach and to take into account only as Research and Development the artistic practice to which higher education institutions consider Research and Development (which will then be used by data collectors) (Frascati Manual, p. 70).

Finally, the Oslo manual makes not a single reference to art as a form of innovation. If the Frascati Handbook focuses on Research and Development, the Oslo Manual does so in the way of applying the knowledge derived from this Research and Development, in its almost 200 pages of the Spanish edition.

Faced with this complex and paradoxical situation the art institution responds through the Vienna Declaration

on Artistic Research. A brief and precise response to the Frascati Handbook published in 2020 and signed by the most relevant actors of artistic research in Europe. We cite the Vienna Declaration: “Artistic research is a field of research based on practice and governed by it” (Vienna Declaration, p. 1).

The aim of the Declaration is threefold: firstly, it reconsiders in a clearer and more appropriate manner the aspects relating to artistic research referred to in the Frascati Handbook; secondly it restructures policies and funding programs and, thirdly, it ensures, doctoral programs in art based on practice in order to further develop research through artistic practices in Europe.

At this point it would be good to note that artistic research occupies a very specific place within the art world. Not all artistic practices are meant to be research - many of them belong to the realm of propaganda, to the production of luxury art objects, or to the needs of representation of social imaginaries. Of course, the culture industries have no interest inartistic research. Other artistic practices that do fall within the scope of research are used as cross-cutting tools, a very important example being the development of pedagogical research from these practices. Another very interesting example is the relationship between artistic practices and architecture, (Neri Oxman, Edouard Cabay). Another transversal area to consider today is the use of artistic practices within the construction of new Anthropocene accounts or idearies (Tomás Saraceno or Eduardo Kac), or in relation to AI and robotics technology (Refik Anadol, Soug Wen). Although it seems complex to define research in art, given the current situation it is very simple. This research is carried out systematically within the academic institution, especially at the third level of academic education (PhD). The Vienna Declaration defines research in art as an epistemic study aimed at increasing knowledge, discernment, understanding of our environment and skills for its management. The Vienna Declaration is a proposal not only to review how to assess the results of knowledge-generating processes through artistic practices but is also a paradigm shift in the production of knowledge.

Alongside this request from European academic institutions, we must face a process of economic devaluation of our practices and knowledge. This economic devaluation is mainly caused by new technologies, to the benefit of the processes linked to their developments (software, dissemination platforms, digitization of content, etc. — the monopoly of symbolic production, in short —) and by the impact of social media in viewers.

If the social stamens intended to discern what knowledge is and what place it occupies in our society, they must review their data-collection systems, but we, artists, must also be aware that our practices must change if they are to be considered research: we need to define the framework where the process will take place in order to be able to come up with sufficiently objective reflection, we need to set up precise tools, conclusions and concepts to build an epistemic architecture.

It is important for this to be so, as one of the overriding aspects of the Vienna Declaration is to enhance in artistic research the knowledge triangle: education, research, and innovation.

3. Interdisciplinary Research Processes and Production of Epistemic Objects

Thus, having established the framework for artistic research, considered the bigger picture, and pointing out what is homologated and assumed as Research, Development Innovation by canonical institutions, we need to stress, as we did before, that while not all artistic practices constitute — or are intended to constitute — forms of research, we advocate that, from strategies and approaches articulated by artistic production, forms of innovation are derived that enriches knowledge and impacts in the community and the society at large.

Let us consider artistic strategies not exclusively as an end to the production of an object called "a work of art", the meaning of which lies, solely, in its own realization. Rather, let us think of such strategies as a system, or a set of systems, in which other modes of thought are activated, in which attention and relations between subject/context/object are enhanced in a complex and non-sequential or discursive manner. Often, this activation derives in the production of an object that collects the complexity of these relationships and becomes an epistemic document, all though this issue does not actually compromise the interest of the processes involved as a research strategy from the arts.

> Originally, drawing, and later writing, as an evolution of it, are the means that deal with the transfer of knowledge from the world of ideas to the material world of strokes, through a series of complex processes. (…) Drawing can be both an end in itself and part of another longer process and conceived in this way as an intermediate resource (López Vílchez y Cabezas, 2011, p. 45).

These processes constitute valuable and innovative practices, capable of activating a complex type of thinking in which a cognitive dimension is empowered, one that establishes unexplicit relationships between concepts, and connect the researcher to her environment where the body acts as a link between material processes and the abstraction of thought. In Zalamea's words:

> The imaginal invention (from the realm of the "eidolon") introduces an important dissymmetry with invention in reason or in language (scope of the "logos"). The strength of a single image usually incorporates, in a visual condensed fragment, an entire complex surrounding environment, much more difficult to achieve with a single word (Zalamea, 2008, p. 103).

Therefore, in these lines we would like to recover the premises of Jean Lave (Cognition in Practice, 1998), who considers cognition as a social activity situated in the permanent relationships that people establish within their community, in the world and with the world, rather than a mental process, bringing this approach into a dialogue with the possibilities of artistic practice, and within it specifically drawing as methodology for research

3.1 Art and Research

The approach from which these lines are presented takes, as has already been said, research as a form of making. Therefore, plastic modelling is considered to enable an exercise of the body and the mind that establishes a revalued relationship between the subject, the object, and its context. The mind/body/space communication translates into an extraordinarily active connection between brain, eye, and hands in which the body, like an antenna, connect the abstract and concrete, the environmental/contextual, and the emotional. Let us remember what Anaxagoras held: "humans are intelligent because they have hands"; or Kant: "the hand is the window of mind"; or Heidegger when he stated: "the hands think." Every movement of the hand in each of the works manufactures thought (Trachana, 2012, p. 289).

Thus, drawing allows one to be placed in a situation of radical cognitive activation. Perhaps, the very precariousness of the medium, as well as the intuitive and versatility of the stroke, favour that the fragility of drawing concentrates and collects that relationship between subject–object and context.

It is therefore necessary to review the observable paradox of what is considered research by University Institutions and Evaluating Agencies: while on the one hand we live in a society in which image increasingly replaces the word in terms of how knowledge is generated and transmitted, on the other hand, image-producing research strategies are viewed with distrust when they do not arise through technology, which means confusing artistic research to a subjective and individual form of expression that dismisses what this research might add to

the community of knowledge.

4. The Hyper Specialization of Know-How

Let us bring back the assertion in the Frascati manual, and remember what is pointed out there: "Artistic representations do not meet the novelty criterion of Research and Development as what they seek is a new form of expression, rather than knowledge" (Artistic expression vs. research 2.67), understanding this approach as a reduction of artistic methodologies to exclusively a subjective form of expression does not value the impact of artistic research in the development of complex thinking.

In this respect, we believe that the partitioning of knowledge and the primacy of the over-specialization of knowledge acts to the detriment of transversal strategies such as artistic ones. This means not only that artistic research is not sufficiently valued as a fully-fledged research methodology, but that other research areas (especially scientific ones) do not take sufficient advantage of what drawing and other artistic strategies offer to the development of complex thinking:

> Therefore, it becomes necessary to seek a naturalistic theory of science that goes beyond puzzle resolution, exploring the ways in which visual models can genuinely represent the real world and be properly evaluated in terms of it. As has just been pointed out, there are several important parts in the overall program of developing a naturalistic intermediate path. An important task, for example, is simply to understand the various ways in which images and other non-propositional resources can be used to represent the world (Baigrie, 1996, p. 272).

The tendency to over-specialization is a sign of the times we live in that contradicts other ways of building human thought. In Burke's words:

> The creativity of the participants in the movement that we know today as Renaissance has sometimes been explained in terms of what we might call "decompartmentalization", i.e., the removal, or at least the weakening, of barriers of communication between the various groups, bridging the gap that had hitherto separated scholars and thinkers from professionals (Burke, P., 2022, p. 64).

To unravel this issue, let us look at drawing from a transversal and interdisciplinary approach, let us value the act of drawing as a cognitive empowerment situation in which breaking the linearity of a word-based discourse makes it possible to establish complex relationships and to develop connections in which the intuitive leads to concrete thought by deploying it, not in a temporal sequence, but in a spatial one. It is the act of drawing a situation in which the researcher sits between the margins, and it is from that oblique look from which he can develop his knowledge.

> (…) we will address two spatial processes. The first step has to do with diagrammatic and how to spatialize thought to fit into a plane. The second, with the concept of installation (brought from contemporary art practices) to think of material ways of installing and displaying research processes (Boserman C. & Ricart D., 2016, p. 59).

To do so, it is necessary to recognize and validate these strategies, and place them at the very centre of research not as a mere illustrative mediation tool, but as a system of thought/action proper to the arts. Developing this system of thought involves training in the premises of artistic production that, in our view, are indissoluble from recognizing research from the arts.

> The cognitive act of perceiving, translating, and assigning occurs continuously when we draft thoughts and receive or process information. This process always occurs through the establishment of relationships and by drawing connections: the structures of semantic relationships incorporated into the anatomical organization of our brain allow us to interact

> with others through language and behaviour. Since drawing can mediate between perception and reflection, it plays a constituent role in the production and communication of knowledge. Gansterer, N. (2017), p. 21.

4.1 Homologation and Polysemy

As we have indicated, the definitions contained in the manuals described above implicitly assume a dichotomy between the word and the image, establishing a hierarchy between the two that actually tells us how mistrustful the image is as a vehicle of knowledge. We have pointed to the paradox between this issue and the increasing predominance of the use of image in our society, and we therefore consider it of interest to analyse, briefly, the reason for this dichotomy.

A system that assesses what is and what is not research, i.e., the question of regulatory type-approval in the interpretation of data, comes into play here. Thus, one of the reasons justifying the hierarchy between word and image may be given by the degree of subjectivity that the system is willing to admit in assimilation of information. If we consider that artistic strategies are aimed at mere personal (subjective) forms of expression it is therefore assumed that artistic production will be received by the community with the same degree of subjectivity, which disables the ability of artistic production to be a gnoseological object, reducing it to the self-absorbed materialization of its author. However, this reading does not correspond to the fundamental role that artistic productions have historically played in the production of human knowledge, so it is questionable whether this doubtful approach actually relates exclusively to contemporary production, i.e., to artistic productions developed once higher education institutions have been set up to offer artistic training. Surprisingly, the premises put forward by an education system in which the importance of the institution as an education centre is recognized, questions its own practice within the meta-system to which it belongs.

5. Conclusions

The contradictions and paradoxes presented in these lines attest to the awkward role of artistic research in the sphere of higher education. An approach is therefore needed to simplify the practice of research in the arts in the context of higher education. This involves extending the role given to artistic productions, placing them not only as examples of subjective human forms of expression, but also legitimizing practices based on artistic research as cross-cutting research methodologies, as research systems that activate complex relationships between the individual and their context.

To this end, it is important to highlight initiatives that focus on bringing these approaches closer to the higher education centers themselves, as is the case with the research project developed at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain entitled “Artistic research: the drawing and graphic processes lab as an embodied research practice” by Laura Fernández Gibellini and supported by the Madrid Government (Comunidad de Madrid- Spain) under the Multiannual Agreement with Universidad Complutense de Madrid in the line Research Incentive for Young PhDs, in the context of the V PRICIT (Regional Program of Research and Technological Innovation) PR 27/21-026”.

In this project, embodied research methodologies are developed from the arts, and these research premises are also brought closer to the community through practices with students and teachers, and through the generation of a networked visual repository with other research centers.

Acknowledgements

This paper establishes the conceptual frame of the project "Artistic research: the drawing and graphic processes lab as an embodied research practice" leaded by Professor Laura Fernández Gibellini, and supported by the Madrid Government (Comunidad de Madrid, Spain), therefore we thank her and the rest of the members of this project for the opportunity of working together in such a fruitful dialogue.

In the near future the project will develop specific scenarios to introduce the concept of research from the arts at the Faculty of Fine Art of the Complutense University. One of these implies the consolidation of the Drawing and Graphic Process Lab; the other concerns the application of artistic research with undergraduate students through a specific project of Educational Innovation, and the third involves the corpus of investigations both practical and theorical developed as part of the Investigation Project.

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