

# ART AND RESEARCH

## Art Research and Research in Higher Art Education

International Symposium

9 - 10 February 2012

At the ENSAPB/Paris-Belleville Academy of Architecture

## GENERAL OUTLINE

Because they have been included in a reform project for higher education in general, the objectives for the development of art research have led art to adopt different organisational criteria from the logical criteria of production and distribution. The production of research is thus expected to adopt scientifically validated procedures in order to enter into dialogue with existing fields of knowledge. However, in spite of what one might have feared, this constraint has not reduced art's ambition to be a dimension of resistance to this univocal quality.

In fact, it has motivated a renewal of technical and scientific knowledge which is not limited to the technologies alone but has assumed various shapes according to the arts involved. What this symposium hopes to do is check the bearings, literally and metaphorically, of art research landscapes in France and in the world.

There is no intention to impose norms or recommend models to be followed, far from it; the point is to showcase the many practices, ideas and projects in progress, and to provide an overview of them that is not simply a catalogue but also an analysis that will allow everyone to come away with tools and ideas for keeping this field of art research in good health.

### What are the distinctive features of art research today?

Art is intrinsically an activity that draws sustenance from many and various skills and disciplines. A salient feature of art research is its capacity to feed on these areas, or even to revive them. In acknowledgement of the maturity that Art research has now acquired, the hope is to give visibility to those projects which are giving Art research not just content and tangible

challenges, but also the capacity to be a powerful source of ideas for research in general.

It is possible to identify three frameworks within which this complexity exists:

- disciplines and fields
- modes of presenting research
- networks and means of recognition for research

## Fields and disciplines

A consideration of research in any discipline nowadays begs not just the question of how far the research in question fits into a broad paradigm of research (as determined by norms and criteria), but also how, specifically, it finds its place within the field. It is therefore important that the question of the distinctive features, or specificities, of art research should not be incorporated into research defined generally as being without specificity, consensual etc., but that it should be treated within the framework of a detailed investigation of the specificities of other research areas. What is specific about research carried out in the art world, compared with that carried out in other areas? To what extent is art research today capable of coming up with scientific research questions?

Unlike what has happened in the universities, where research was part and parcel of the disciplines' autonomy, art research enters the fray at a time when the notion of a discipline, as a domain of thought and homogeneous practice, is in a state of crisis. The various disciplines are not actually disappearing, but find themselves subject to hybridisation, availability to all and sundry, and generalised criticism. Although the concept of hybridisation was much used in the 1980s to designate a policy of mixing different art forms, this intertwining of subjects has been extended to the scientific fields, with a new meaning. Hybridisation is no longer so much a matter of overlapping aims or preselected forms, as a set of practices that have contributed to the emergence of a grey area with techniques and objectives that have become impossible to categorise or assign to any particular field of activity.

Thus, art, in maintaining a dialogue with the exact sciences and the human sciences, does so from the perspective of its own objectives, at the same time developing a standpoint vis-à-vis these disciplines. By using digital tools and technology in dance or interactive works or music, it injects specific questions into the research dynamic that surrounds them. By treating the question of the document or the archive in the procedures of fictional documentation, it develops historical objectives and builds a critical relationship with history.

Not only has art not given up its own tools and experimentation principles in developing the research aspect, it has appropriated scientific tools and objectives to construct its own patterns of thought. Developing art research within a scientific framework has not led to its being subjugated to the norms of scientificity, but has allowed art to engage in reflection upon the disciplines of science on its own terms and according to its own modalities.

## Modes of presenting research

This particularity also concerns the preparation and the forms in which research is presented. Art research takes art away from its position as an object of research for other disciplines without, however, limiting itself to its claim over "creative subjects" (i.e. activities of expression). Undertaking research is more than simply ceasing to be an object in order to re-appropriate a discourse about oneself, it is also an adventure of exploration; it involves finding forms that will generate new ways of thinking. For this reason, it is important to latch on to the development of new practices in writing, production and data collection likely to generate new statement positions that will do away with the cleavage between "theory" and "practice" and redefine the functions of each.

## Networks and means of recognition for research

Artists' research projects, when they feed and move research in existing scientific fields, show evidence of the unique epistemological value of art research. The question remains as to how far they are recognised in research institutions and teaching courses. How do we fit into the current university research environment, into its departments and its methods of assessment? Which research departments does art research belong in? What form should the post-graduate cycles take in higher education establishments for art? How can art research activity be given proper institutional recognition, while conserving its own specificities and those of art? What form do current post-graduate courses in art take in France and elsewhere in the world?

One point which we feel it is important to draw attention to in this symposium is the very active role played by the various places where art is produced, conserved and distributed. As well as university research departments, already engaged in these research activities and enjoying the prestige of special statutes, it is worth remarking that the teaching institutions are

not the only ones to have felt themselves concerned by this research; so, also have the places where art is produced and distributed - e.g. FRACs (*regional contemporary arts centres*), museums, art centres, institutes, and foundations.

This diversity points to the fact that research is a complex collective activity, carried out by people with extremely diverse skills and objectives, and a source of rich interactions. Researchers, artists and directors of centres work together with procedures similar to landscape design, in a collaboration reminiscent of ecosystems. Research activities depend on groups with complementary skills, and fulfil diverse objectives which are not limited to the mere production of research documents. They can involve production, distribution, demonstration, as well as new, dynamic connections between different activities. To this should be added new places for reflection, in places not immediately destined for art. It will be fruitful to consider the different ways in which this functions from one country to another.

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