**[What is artistic research?]**

It's a difficult question, but I would call artistic research a MacGuffin. A MacGuffin is a plot device in films, basically an empty shell. Because, for example, if you take musical composers, they would claim that teaching of composition since Pythagoras is artistic research. Actually, composers used to be part of the scientific system, the upper sciences, as early as in the Middle Ages and before. Or writers would say that poetics since Aristotle has been artistic research. Or architects would say that architectural theory since Alberti is artistic research. And designers might say that design research since the Bauhaus is research. Visual artists would probably say at least since conceptual art we have such a thing as artistic research, but that maybe you could even go back, for example, to Leonardo and even any kind of art practice.

But it's only the academics working in the institutional field of artistic research who claim that it's a discipline that was invented in the 1990s by Christopher Frayling. It was a bit surprising to me when I first learned this, through this discipline.

But maybe the most general definition of artistic research is research that is being done as art practice or as an art project. But it can also be art that uses work methods and means of academic and nonacademic research.

**[What is the difference to research in the natural sciences and humanities?]**

I would say that the most obvious difference is that artistic research does not produce reproducible its results. It's not validated, and it might not even have a truth claim. And in some cases, it might be even improper science, to the point of including manipulations and lies. If you rule this out from the possibilities of art practice and artistic research, I think you have a real problem.

But maybe we can differentiate by drawing a bigger spectrum of sciences and research disciplines. Maybe the most rigorous and formalized works of research can be found in mathematics. Then it becomes already a little bit more empirical in the hard sciences. Then you go to social sciences, then to the humanities and ultimately you end up with artistic research as a research discipline that is the least rigorously disciplined. I would describe this as a spectrum of a progressively decreasing principle of “quod erat demonstrandum”, i.e. the quod erat demonstrandum in a formal proof or in scientific theories that are verified by formal proofs, which includes the reproducibility of results and methods. Ultimately, you could call it a difference between objectivity and subjectivity, although a lot needs to be said also about the so-called objectivity of hard sciences in terms of discourse, politics, et cetera. But very clearly, there is a difference in terms of formal methods, proofs and reproducibility.

**[What is the “Mehrwert” (“added value”) of artistic research?]**

See, a problem is the German word “Mehrwert”. If you use it as Karl Marx used it, then it’s translated as “surplus value” and that's a part of his economic theory. And that's why I thought you pose an economical question that maybe I cannot answer because I'm not an economist. Well, if you stay with Marx, you could say that artistic research of course serves those who practice it as a surplus value, by winning [social] distinction, in the sense of Bourdieu. I.e. artists gain a higher social and professional status [through becoming researchers], which is nothing new.

That already happened, for example in the Neoplatonist academy of Marsilio Ficino in the Florentine Renaissance, where artists were promoted to being fellow philosophers. Vice versa, there are researchers in the humanities who work with speculative essayistic and artistic means to distinguish themselves from more average academics. Look, for example, at an academic like Avital Ronell.

But if you refer to societal or social surplus value [of artistic research], then I'm not so sure. Perhaps you could best answer this question for design research, which has the potential, for example, to think about ecological and social problems in different ways than traditional empirical sciences. From an artistic point of view, if we flip the perspective and do not approach this question from the perspective of academic research, but from that of art practice, then the clear surplus value, or added value, of artistic research is that it relativizes or, even does away with, naive romantic assumptions of what artistic practice is.

##### **[What is the urgency of artistic research?]**

Again, this is a very difficult question. I think the real question is: for whom [is it urgent]? Certainly, I think that artists [and everyone else] should do their research even out of an existential necessity and urgency. There's nothing more depressing than art, whether it calls itself artistic research or not, that is not driven by any urgency. And I must say, working at an art school, and also in the larger art system, this [lack of urgency] too often is the reality.

**I**n that sense, your question is almost redundant because it's a general question that applies to any kind of art and artistic practice. It becomes more difficult if it concerns the existential necessity for society to have a discipline called artistic research, as opposed to already existing disciplines. I would be a little bit cautious with that because often enough, urgency and necessity claims boil down to promises that are being made. Such as in the European Bauhaus project which seems to have an underlying assumption that only artists and designers can fix today’s existential problems such as the climate crisis and catastrophe. collapse of capitalism, et cetera. But I'm a little bit afraid [of overpromising]. Because it ultimately throws as back to the [earlier] question of verification and reproduction [of research]. I think it's a very risky gamble to assume that artists,m designers and others doing this type of research can actually deliver on such promises. When you're overpromising, then you end up building up a speculative bubble like in the banking system where, I think, you can end up shooting yourself in the foot very badly if you overpromise.

##### **[What is the relevance of artistic research for art education and cultural education?]**

I think you specifically refer to cultural and art pedagogy? Such as art pedagogy in schools or educational programs in museums?

A really good example for that was last year's documenta fifteen. In my view, the whole documenta fifteen was a giant experiment in creating a commons. Not just depicting a commons or reflecting upon the commons in art, but actually creating a commons in real life and see what happens. Including everything that goes wrong and even horribly wrong, as we know. Everything I saw at documenta fifteen qualified as artistic research.

I think this was maybe the most significant takeaway from documenta fifteen, that it introduced a method of speculation and experimentation that also is a real life experiment, with the potential of transforming art pedagogy and art education into something more radical. I often consider it a problem of art education that it ends up being complacent. It just wants to make everyone a better citizen and integrate everyone into society [as it is]. Which also is the typical downfall of community art projects. Of course you could argue that what ruangrupa and documenta fifteen did was community art, too, and also very much driven by an educational or community art approach. But at the same time, it was a radical experiment [with living otherwise], and it could only be a radical experiment because it was research-driven, ruangrupa itself being a multidisciplinary collective consisting of journalists, architects, artists and educators. So, hopefully, [those kind of radical impulses are] what artistic researchers can give to this field [of art education and pedagogy].

##### **[When does artistic research start historically, and does it go through changes concerning understanding, concepts and methods since then?]**

I kind of tried to already answer this question in the beginning when I said that for many people in the discipline, artistic research is a concept that started with Christopher Frayling in London in the 1990s, while for others it might begun with Pythagoras and his equation of natural science, mathematics and musical harmony more than 2500 years ago. I think that the problem here is that the term “art” in the sense – literally in the linguistic sense – we use it today, has only existed since the mid-18th century. So it's actually a very young term. And before that, all sciences, all academic disciplines, but also all vocational occupations were called “artes” or arts.

This was a semantic shift that happened in the 18th century. And not only is this is a historical shift, but it's a very regionally limited shift, namely one that only happened in Western culture. If you look, for example, at the whole of Africa or the whole of Asia, the notion of art in this sense only exists as a Western import, including its differentiation of arts from crafts. I think all these differentiations are problematic. I'm maybe old-fashioned in proposing that we should consider going back to the older notion of the “artes” where we don't make those separations between arts, crafts, sciences, practices, et cetera.

I also think that this impulse already existed in the experimental arts movements of the 20th century, for example, in Soviet constructivism, Fluxus and Situationism. They already made these proposals.

##### **[Is there a relationship between artistic research and digital cultures?]**

This is a can of worms. We [both] previously had a conversations about what we actually define as digital cultures. You can define digital cultures more pragmatically or colloquially as everything that is related to electronics operating with zeros and ones, the devices that we use in our everyday life and the networks that proliferate them. Then there's also a more theoretical, scientific definition of digitality that is actually not related to electronics at all, according to which , for example, the keys of a piano are a digital system because they're differentiated. But if we understand “digital cultures” in the sense of how, for example, internet and contemporary computing has changed visual culture, everyday culture and society, then of course we can observe that there has factually been a return of this older notion of “ars”. If you look at a company like Google, you can’t tell whether its work is scientific, engineering, in media, design, or politics. What is actually a device like this mobile phone that [I am holding into the camera]? It's all of these at once. You can describe it with the pre-modern or medieval notion of “ars” much better than with the modern terms of technology, sciences, design, et cetera. That also means that we need to rethink what we actually define as artistic research. In a way, it boils down to rescuing something that got lost [in the past]. Poetics, for example, was still an academic [research] discipline for Aristotle and others, and [with artistic research] it needs to be brought back to being recognized as an academic research discipline. And then perhaps something [as trivial as] a digital mobile device is just a very good way of demonstrating that urgency, because it immediately makes clear why these so-called modern distinctions [of arts, sciences and other areas of knowledge and practice] are actually very outmoded.

##### **[What is the future of artistic research?]**

In my opinion, it's related to exactly the problem that I tried to sketch when juxtaposing the notion of “ars” versus ar. [The question of what is the future of artistic research] is, I think, intrinsically linked to the question, what is actually the future of art, in the sense how we understand art. [Today, we still understand it] more or less in the sense of “fine art” or “beaux arts”, as they were first defined in the mid-18th century. The question is whether this notion can still be maintained. Again, I would like to come back to documenta fifteen because I think it was the first big-scale art event that also put that question on the map. By asking: does it make any sense that we still make these divisions [between art and other practices and fields of knowledge]? Also, does it still make any sense that we continue with these Western paradigms of art? In that sense, the future of artistic research is first of all that it could work as a catalyst to rethink research as a whole. And in the best case, it could act as a catalyst that will dissolve itself. If artistic research will be successful, I think, it will stop to exist because it will be superfluous. And in that sense, all research should be artistic research. But even [the word] “artistic” shouldn't make any difference in what we define or practice as research.