METHODODICITY
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In the topical practice of visual art, artists increasingly consider their activities a form of research. Moreover, the concept of research appears to play a crucial role in today's redefinition of advanced art education, where - similar to established, academic research schools and institutions - one started to think in terms of research projects and PhD degrees. Therefore, it seems to be urgent today to reflect on the specificity of artistic research, whether institutionalized or not. I believe that particularly differences and relationships with regard to other forms of - established - alpha, beta, and gamma research should be investigated. What are, however, the criteria defining the specificity of artistic research?

The concept of research as such already connotes a certain expectation. After all, research entails an organized manner of approach, a systematic analysis of information, and a contribution to a knowledge economy. Research also implies, though, a certain ethical responsibility in the sense of investigation for the sake of a better understanding of the world or investigation for the sake of improving the world. But what is the specific meaning of research in the context of the practice of art? Let's first attempt to define the core research activity in general. One could say that each form of research seems to focus on the formulation of a methodology. The research may or may not be driven by grand inspiration or accidental discovery, it will ultimately lead to a novel, methodologically formulated form of knowledge. Thus, the soundness of the method determines the value of the results, whereby continual control should demonstrate to what extent the conditions of the methodology have been applied adequately. While research methods obviously vary according to the field and subject of investigation, they all share the same basic principle: the methods of research are both concerned with formulating questions and providing the answers to those questions. Therefore, I believe that research can be most adequately described as methodic links between questions and answers or answers and questions - in random order.

Today, a similar approach to research can be found in topical artistic activities. With that, an important shift has occurred in the modernist paradigm whereby the accent is no longer on practice as production. Rather, practice has turned into a dynamic point of reference for theory-driven experimentation in general. While the traditional academic, artistic model could be described as one where experimentation is embedded in experience, the topical model is one in which experience is embedded in experimentation. However, the research as conducted by artists today is not characterized by an objective, empirical approach, since art, obviously,
does not strive for generalization, repeatability, and quantification. Rather, artistic research is directed towards unique, particular, local knowledge. In that sense, it seamlessly connects with Baumgarten’s classic definition of the aesthetic domain where aesthetic knowledge is knowledge about the singular. Although artistic knowledge cannot be generalized into laws - since it applies to the singular and unique - it still is knowledge, says Baumgarten. However, the emphasis on the singular and unique in the aesthetic domain does not imply that research is impossible, as philosopher of science Karl Popper would argue. After all, artistic research does satisfy a number of fundamental research criteria, such as a focus on communication, a (self) critical attitude, and an emphasis on autonomous research. In contrast to academic research focused on the creation of professional knowledge, the domain of art seems to imply expression of understanding on account of experience. Furthermore, while academic research is characterized by purposeful uselessness, artistic research feels strongly about a committed, social, and non-academic destination. Yet, each artistic research project should be able to answer two questions. First, why should its research be conducted in the domain of visual art and, secondly, what is the nature of its methodological tools.

The epistemological perspective of uniqueness and otherness demands a further methodological contemplation. Indeed, different from established forms of research, the methodological path of artistic research and its implied production of knowledge cannot easily be defined. For example, take the research of the Amsterdam artist Joke Robaard. Her artistic investigations in the domain between art and fashion resulted in foldlike contours and stylistic models elliptically moving between commodification and emancipation. “Garments are continuously presented in new constellations, but never really described. Where are the texts that map the progress of the everyday garment? S(T)OCK is a presentation of an investigation into “archetypal” everyday garments, in order to find a different informational language.” In collaboration with Joke Robaard, Gerrit Rietveld Academy students worked on an archive where garments and their surroundings are represented in series, maps, books etc. Garments show – in endless modulations – the behaviors of people; replace ‘garment’ with ‘feature’ and you will understand the extent to which people imbue clothes with identity. The archive is no static accumulation of forms, it rather aims to create a dynamic “garment cartography”. In Robaard’s research, a perpetual play emerges between containment and liberation. That play ultimately disrupts each definitive dominance of both the traditional, modernist art discours and the one-dimensional rhetoric of fashion while moving towards a third plane in the style of the interstitial space.
One could conclude that artistic research (and the institutions admitting such research in their curriculum) should continually insert a meta-perspective enabling critical reflection on both the position and temporary situation of the research project. Fascinatingly, such methodology could be considered a form of mapping - as, for example, Joke Robaard underlines. Such cartography could occur in line with a two-ax system, i.e., a twofold methodological perspective focusing on modes of enquiry. The first is exemplified by Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the artist is the one who sees what others leave unnoticed. That would identify artistic research with a search for the understanding of our existential conditions. The second perspective is illustrated by Lyotard’s maxim that the artist must pose the question of what art is. Such viewpoint identifies artistic research with our need to pursue a speculative mode of questioning for its own sake connected with the activation of imagination. Topical artistic research takes place within the domain of these two axes in an operational, process-based, and experimental way. Different from one-dimensional academic research, the perspective of artistic research cannot determined beforehand. What is at stake is rather a continuous self-reflective movement contemplating the situation while marking out a position with respect to the axes.

In the domain of artistic research, it seems to be crucial to maintain an attitude of interrogation and prolific constructivism while openly facing the changes ahead. With that, the necessity of connectivity presents itself continuously in the form of temporary, flexible constructions revealing problems in need of novel methodological programs. Thus, artistic research could lead to a methodological map indicating how, why and where the research is progressing. Only afterwards is it possible to determine whether the methodological process deployed has been entirely mapped - similar to how philosophy in generating new concepts differs from other forms of research (Cf. Deleuze and Guattari What is Philosophy). It seems to me that artistic research should not be characterized by a rigid methodology. I would rather embrace a methododicy, i.e., a firm and rationally justified belief in a methodological result, whose existence ultimately cannot be legitimized apriori.