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Henk Slager

EDITORIAL

The possibilities for publishing, showing, distributing, and promoting are currently expanding at a swift pace. Blogs, Second Life, Facebook, fashion design as social event, government campaigns as television drama, and biennials exploding into a host of manifestations and openings. That wave of dissemination also affects artistic research and its issues and debates. How is the outcome of artistic research propagated in a liquid, open system? What is the most effective way to communicate a work of art? How do best practices circulate while contributing to the discussion on the specificity of the artistic research practice? And what is the role of the art academy and its research environment in the process of dissemination?

DARE 5 (Dutch Artistic Research Event) engaged in *Doing Dissemination*.

In contrast to former DARE editions where traditionally a symposium took place as part of the presentation and introduction week in September, in 2010 the symposium was held in April where it operated as propaganda machine spitting out topics, issues, and many examples of visual activities. Clearly, the *Doing Dissemination* symposium functioned as a source of inspiration for all *maHKU* students – and *maHKU* staff as well – which could be noticed in the 2010 *maHKU* graduation exhibitions (*maHKU*-platform) in Utrecht in Academiegalerie, Aorta (*Subtle Revolutions*, curator Arjen Oosterman), Expodium (*Collective Individualism*, curator Mika Hannula) and *swk* from 1 through 12 September.

For the DARE 5 symposium, *maHKU* tested a specific form of symposium-as-activity. No more one-way-traffic with an active speaker on stage addressing a passive, awaiting audience. *Doing Dissemination* implied a pure Platonic interpretation of the concept of symposium: guests, students, and staff involved in interactive table conversations with circulating speakers and moderators while indulging in the fabulous courses students not only cooked but also served – with the help of some staff. The symposium activity was started by keynote speaker Nicolas Bourriaud. Other speakers included Jurgen Bey, Geert Lovink, BikvanderPol, and Remco Scha who all spoke and presented work in the interval between courses.

In *Artistic Delay*, Nicolas Bourriaud claims that our world without people as active actors affects the current dissemination of the field of culture. The irresponsible subject forced away in many ways from the political arena makes that the theme of distance between activity and passivity has to be reexamined. In *Doing Research in the Age of Digital Clouds*, Annette Balkema involves figures such as the vocalist, the cook, and the butterfly in doing research at art academies. The figures connect with rhizomatic thought and dissemination steering research-based projects away from digital superhighways while morphing them into topical cloud cultures.

The Graduate School as research environment was the theme of the conference *The Academy Strikes Back* in Brussels on June 4-5 *maHKU*

organized in collaboration with Sint-Lukas Academy. *The Academy Strikes Back* was the concluding manifestation of a triptych including *A Certain Ma-ness* (Amsterdam 2008, see *maHKUzine* 6) and *Becoming Bologna* (Venice 2009, see *maHKUzine* 8). During the Brussels conference, Renee Green discussed the best-practice *Spheres of Interest: Experiments in Thinking and Acting*, a graduate seminar at SFAI (San Francisco Art Institute) relating artistic research to the notion of formations. In the context of dissemination of research results, Dieter Lesage pleads for the emancipation of artistic research while questioning the function of the written supplement as a contextualization of the work of art. Lesage claims that the research results should speak for themselves.

In *Practicing Research: Singularising Knowledge*, Irit Rogoff critically interrogates the academy as location for the dissemination of an artistic knowledge production particularly in the light of protocols of current cognitive capitalism.

An immanent investigation into the conditions of presenting artistic research was realized by the professorship Artistic Research in the form of the exhibition *Critique of Archival Reason* in February in the Dublin Royal Hibernian Academy as part of the EARN (European Artistic Research Network) conference *Arts Research, Publics and Purposes*. Two Utrecht PhD students, Jeremiah Day and Irene Kopelman, participated in the project. Tim Stott critically reviews the event in the form of a research report.

Nicolas Bourriaud

ARTISTIC DELAY

I do not want to address directly my most recent book *The Radicant*, but to take a different angle on the theme I believe is crossing every domain today from the political to the aesthetical, from design to arts, from any possible activity to any possible field. I would like to address the question of dissemination considered from the opposition activity and passivity – a theme crucial today in many ways.

First of all, I will go into our everyday life. We live in a period of history dominated by the question of economic globalization with supranational political and economic entities such as the European union. We also went through and still are in a huge economic crisis. The distance that has been established recently between us as citizens, as individuals, and the overwhelming phenomena of political life in general, creates a very specific frame of mind. We do not always realize this. Perhaps the main character in the political arena today is the irresponsible subject, the subject who does not own citizenship for several reasons. Because he or she is an immigrant, because he or she is illegal, because he or she is far away from political decision making and what they address. It seems that we all have become irresponsible and out of touch with effective political measures. We seem to be indolent in front of the progression of the logic of neo-liberalism all over the world; we seem to be spectators facing an image industry producing more and more images for us; we seem to be puppets in a theater play whose directors appear to be far away from us; we live in a civilization where the decision to fire people from a factory where they have been working for the last thirty years might have been taken by someone living in Miami or just someone somewhere in the world, someone who never had any close experience with the work they did. So, distances are increasingly consequential. The impression of a world where people are purely passive, where people are no longer active actors, creates an imagery affecting the current dissemination of the field of culture.

When you take the history of the avant-garde and the history of left-wing thought over the last fifty years, it is quite obvious that the main theme is the abolition of the barriers between the actor and the spectator, between the producer and the consumer. That was more or less the theme of my book *Postproduction* (2002). The abolition of the distance between the artist and the beholder is similar to that; it is the activation of a will to suppress the barriers between the active and the passive. The distance and abolition of the barriers between activity and passivity has been the real theme of the last fifty years.

In a recent book of French philosopher Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), he pleads for the exact opposite. Rancière claims that it is not that bad to be a spectator, it is not that bad to be perceived after all. He attempts to repudiate the abolition of the barrier between the active and the passive in recent history. That is interesting, since it seems that today the border between the active and the passive, between



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the producer and the consumer, is less and less discussed and more and more accepted – also on a political level in the representation of our entire world.

Another writer, Jean Claude Milner has published recently *L'arrogance du présent. Regards sur une décennie, 1965-1975* (2009) a book where he views May 1968 from an interesting angle implying that it was the moment of maximum activity. Everybody was part of the masses, everybody thought that he or she was active. The normal passivity one has as a citizen, as someone who is living in a representative democracy had entirely been abolished in favor of a much more active way of expressing ideas.

The question of activity has been extremely central in the history of the 20th century for artists, writers, thinkers, and also, as I stated above, for the notion of dissemination. The mass is not the crowd. The mass is active, in some ways, and that is what I was trying to elucidate when I mentioned May 1968. As a mass one is part of the atoms of the very cloud of ideas. One develops and transforms things. The crowd on the other hand is passive in some way. It is a mass but disseminated, without collective strength. And that is very interesting as an image.

Bertold Brecht, who seems to become more and more influential in the art world today, thought that the spectators of his theater plays should actually complete the play themselves. He expected you as a spectator to expand, to disseminate, to integrate, to confront what you saw and understood and connect it with real life. Then you are no longer a mere spectator; you have become a receiver, and as a receiver you can start acting yourself. However, there is a small delay between receiving and acting and that is important. There is a delay between the moment you saw the play as a spectator, and the moment you can deploy it into real life. That delay is what art is about. Let me clarify that statement with some examples.

Marcel Duchamp called his masterpiece *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (the Large Glass)* also known as “the delay in glass” since the separated glass panels show that the bride and the bachelors never come together, they are forever bride and bachelors.

In 1969, Lawrence Weiner defined his approach to the production of his artworks as works conceived in words. The work should be realized by its owner or the collection where it is included. Thus, the receiver is supposed to produce the piece by him or herself. Receivers are active, they are not mere spectators stuck in passivity. Again, there is that determinant notion of delay.

In Marcel Duchamp's writings on art, one can again find the notion of delay. Duchamp claims that the famous sentence stating that it is the beholder who makes the work of art implies participation constituting the meaning given by the beholder. It seems that the artist and the beholder are actually playing the same game. To underscore that statement, Duchamp uses the metaphor of the chess game, one plays white and the other black.

That illustrates the difference between the notion of participation in the 1960s and what I have been calling relational aesthetics. In *Relational Aesthetics*, starting from the actual production of artists, I try to describe the evolution of the art world and the collective imagery where the inter-human sphere is more important than ever, since it has become reified by the very process of economy. The dissimilarity between 1960s partici-

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pation and what I have been calling the relational might be elucidated by the metaphor of a tennis game. It is true that the artist and the receiver are on the same ground; they are in fact playing the same game, as artists, as critics, or as spectators. But, as in a tennis game, one serves and the other returns. So it is the same game, but it is not the same gesture.

That is how the 1960s notion of participation and what I call the relational today diverge. Describing relational aesthetics shows a symbolic redistribution of the active and the passive. For example, through the construction of a community or at least a situation where one does not discriminate between a producer and a receiver. They are able to be part of the same community, they are playing the same game, but they are not making the same type of gestures.

I believe that today it is quite important to expand the realm of the human as much as we can into every aspect of our life. First of all, it is politically important, as we are uneasy with many aspects of what used to be our participation as citizens in the political arena. We are getting far away from decision making, from the political in general. So, we have to return to the political domain in different ways. Art is one of the ways for expanding the human dimension in every aspect of our life.

Already in the 1970s, Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote about the un-human gaining ground everywhere in our societies. Activity becomes really important when we talk about a subject, about a world, about the art world, where it is possible to inject humanity into every aspect. Today we live in an increasingly abstract world where the power has become so global that it has become invisible. Interestingly, many artists today try to personalize some aspects of that invisibility and abstractness. For example, Liam Gillick creating an opera implying the vice-chairman of Sony named Ibuka. We have never heard of vice-chairman Ibuka, but he actually is one of those persons who have power, who is taking part in a life we can hardly imagine.

Today the capitalist dream is to create a world where everything is entirely abstract. Then there is a counter-abstraction to be invented in some way.

That is one of the reasons I am very interested in today's abstract painting. Some of those paintings try to reverse the vocabulary of impersonification and to somehow reinject humanity within the system.

I would like to conclude with the theme of my most recent book, *The Radicant* (2009) that is connected with the issues I just discussed. *The Radicant* describes a living organism such as ivy or strawberry producing its own roots while inventing itself. So it is mobile; it is not an organism sticking into the ground. The radicant is an organism we could take with us.

The Radicant and the way it relates to the question of dissemination is a plea against the vision of history determined by the prefix post: post-modern, post-political, post-everything. I believe that we have to get rid urgently of the civilization of the post, since it ties us to history in a wrong way. Gilles Deleuze once said, you need a lot of memory to forget the past. So we need that memory and collect it now in order to forget the image within which we have been imprisoned for the last forty years.

The idea that we live in an after history, that we have arrived too late is a view of history, linked to a certain perspective on geography, pointing to identity as a kind of central meaning for all of us. I once thought, provocatively, that identity is our main problem. In one way or another we should get rid of the notion of identity and of being identical to something.

Identity produces the view of sticking to an already existing image and it seems that we have forgotten that. We tend to think that the content of our personality is an identity. But I no longer think that that is the case.

We do not need to correspond to identities. We have to get rid of them just to transform the postmodern question of Where are you from? into the question of Where are we going to? That question is much more related to modernism as a historical and recurrent phenomenon.

When we talk about readdressing the very question of dissemination what we have to state is, Where are we going to? That historical question has resurfaced time and again in different forms and today we are facing the task of reformulating it again. The first version of that question – as I wrote in the last part of *The Radicant* – was the biblical episode of the Exodus. So the question of Where are we going to? is quite an old question. We have to raise that question anew today, since we should be afraid of a civilization where identity, abstraction, and invisibility of power have become the pillars of our culture.

This text is based on an edited talk (DARE 5, Doing Dissemination, Utrecht 2010).

Annette W. Balkema

DOING RESEARCH IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL CLOUDS

Dissemination seems to be the latest buzzword in the world of the Net. In *Doing Dissemination*, maHKU's DARE symposium 5, the notion of dissemination points to Blogs, Second Life, Facebook and other (social) media currently transforming the spread of information while sweeping along adjoining worlds of publishing, exhibiting, distributing, and promoting. Another example of dissemination buzzing could recently be noticed at Rotterdam-based Institute for the Unstable Media V2. They stress dissemination in their event *Test Lab: Tools for Propaganda* and link it with information, media technologies, and the "face of digital propaganda in the digital age."

In the good old days of cyberspace – an outdated term already – information always pointed to interconnectivity apparently inspired by the then correct cybernotation of continuously interconnecting digital information highways. Did we leave our digital superhighways? Are we travelling somewhere else?

In a theoretical sense, the notion of interconnectivity could always be elucidated by philosopher Deleuze's open system of interconnectivity pictured by the plant figure of the rhizome, that famous root-like stem growing along or under the ground while germinating into bifurcations, shoots, and roots and creating an image of continuously criss-crossing lines. Multiplicities, maps, diagrams, geographies are all terms connected with the liquidity and mobility Deleuze introduced in the theoretical and philosophical realm through rhizomatic thought. Philosophers dealing with motion and movement obviously always attempt to dissolve rigid dualist oppositions, to disintegrate dialectic triads, to defeat linear "tree thought" and create a mode of thought that is fluid and streaming and able to erase the universal, hierarchical terminology of Beginning, Truth, or Being. To expand his image of movement and motion even further, Deleuze's texts are filled with a vocabulary of mobility taken from physics including Brownian motion, the emission of quantum mechanics' virtual particles, Mandelbrot fractals, and turbulence.

The current buzzword dissemination, however, opens up another field of theorizing or philosophizing, since dissemination is inextricably bound to philosopher Derrida, a contemporary of Deleuze. Derrida's introduction of movement in thought does not imply plant metaphors or any physics terminology. Derrida's movement is inspired by the field of linguistics where movement and motion are produced by suspending signification, by hovering before any capitalized term, by delaying definitions, by a play of signifiers. Such a conception of movement involves the creation of various open semantic chains where a specific Derridean vocabulary, including interval, trace, spacing, and différance, denotes



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movement and motion. Dissemination is inserted into one of the Derridean open chains and implies movement as “seminal différance” linked with insemination and the random movement of “swarming semen”, “a swarm of bees”, or “the anonymous force, the proliferating, the working imperfect of the swarm”.^{1/2}

Not only Derridean bees or semen swarm. Also Deleuze implies swarming in his writings through Brownian motion – the random movement of crowds or the movement of small dust particles suspended in a liquid. Is swarming the mobile bridge where dissemination and interconnectivity could meet? Let’s investigate that question further through the practice of research at the art academy.

DOING RESEARCH – THE VOCALIST, THE COOK, AND THE RESEARCHER

Last year, I made two bold statements in one of the Modes of Research seminars intended to move *maHKU*’s Fine Art and Design students into novel forms of doing research. First, I referred to Deleuze who claims in *Negotiations* in an interview with Christian Descamps and Robert Maggiori, “Vocalists are what I call anyone doing research into sound or the voice in fields as varied as theater, song, cinema, audiovisual media (...).”³ I stated: for Deleuze one notion or rather one profession – vocalists – opens up a research trajectory radiating into and interconnecting with all kinds of fields, all kinds of research directions: theater, song, cinema, audiovisual media. To Deleuze’s list or rather Deleuze’s map, one could add fields and notions such as sound art, Internet art, urban noise, white noise, YouTube.

Another and even bolder statement was: One could read Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* as a cookbook. A cookbook for the research epicure hungry for concepts and modes of thought. How to think is how to cook whereby the researcher’s concepts lining a mode of thought are similar to the cook’s ingredients lining a recipe. I added: but in a Deleuzian sense, lining up is not a neat row. Deleuzian lines are always criss-crossing and traversing in a radiating and vibrating network, creating fresh, frivolous, and flashing connections and concepts. So, I would like to turn to some “Deleuzian adepts” and look at their line-ups and their creative and cool ingredients. Let’s see what’s cooking.

So, what *was* cooking? And could the cook be compared to a vocalist doing research in all kinds of fields? We started by investigating single concepts or a form of serial concepts as ingredients for cooking up a research trajectory, where students tried to figure out what the field of research would be.

CONCEPTS RESEARCH TRAJECTORY 1

Sandwiched Action Space Dilemma

Hactivist Design

Circuit Bending

Upcycling

Provotype

QUESTION What is cooking here? What discipline, what field?

ANSWER Otto von Busch’ *Fashion-able*. Field: Fashion.

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¹ Jacques Derrida Positions (1982) : 44-45

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

² Jacques Derrida Dissemination (1981) : 334-

335, 343 London: Continuum

³ Gilles Deleuze Negotiations (1995) : 28

New York: Columbia University Press



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CONCEPTS RESEARCH TRAJECTORY 2

Smart dust
Digital graffiti
Intelligent light
Dark matter
Interactive design

QUESTION What is cooking here? What discipline, what field?

ANSWER Judith Gor's master research essay *Light Designs Space*. Field: Public Space Design.

CONCEPTS RESEARCH TRAJECTORY 3

Digital splines
Compactified information
Speed of light
Pulsating pixel points
Dissymmetric layers

QUESTION What is cooking here? What discipline, what field?

ANSWER Annette W. Balkema's *Perception and the Lines of Light*. Field: Visual Art.

And of course, as research epicures we had to indulge in

CONCEPTS RESEARCH TRAJECTORY 4

1 pound of spaghetti
4 oz. of butter
Parmesan cheese
4 oz. of spinach
4 oz. of Porcini
White Truffle Olive Oil Urbani

QUESTION What is cooking? What discipline, what field?

ANSWER Italian Spaghetti with White Truffle Oil. Field: Cooking.

Of course, a simple row of concepts – or notions – does not produce a research trajectory. Concepts in the Deleuzian sense branch out into all kinds of fields similar to how Deleuze's vocalists are involved in doing research. In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari paint a vivid picture of their view of what a concept is. A concept "refers (..) to a string of ideas that are connected over a lacuna (rather than linked together by continuation)"⁴; a concept "must be interesting even if it is repulsive"⁵; "Every concept has components and is defined by them. (...) It is a multiplicity, although not every multiplicity is conceptual."⁶; zones and bridges are the joints of the concept. (..) each concept will (..) be considered as the point of coincidence, condensation, or accumulation of its own components⁷; concepts "are created in bursts and constantly bifurcate."⁸; "concepts are centers of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all the others. This is why they all resonate rather than cohere or correspond with each other. (...) Even bridges from one concept to another are still junctions, or detours, which do not define any discursive whole. They are moveable bridges."⁹

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⁴⁻⁹ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari *What is Philosophy?* (1994) : 161, 83, 15, 19-20, 76, 23 London: Verso

The zones as the joints of the concepts in the Deleuzian sense are relationships of speed & slowness, movement & rest or nonlocalizable relations sweeping up two distant or contiguous points. A view connected to the emission of particles from quantum mechanics based on Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle* stating that one can never be exactly sure of both the position and the velocity of a particle – the more accurately one knows the one, the less accurately one can know the other.

The concepts' moveable bridges and joints, their vibrations and resonances all portray that flexible open system of interconnectivity illustrated by Deleuze's and Guattari's sketch of the multiplicity or the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

That picture of an open, fluid, interconnecting and metamorphosing system has attracted many, many students in the process of starting up a research trajectory. However, Deleuze's credo "doing philosophy is trying to create or invent concepts" or "philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" have proven too far-fetched for many students.^{10/11} In that context, I would like to stress that doing research is *not* the art of creating or inventing concepts. Rather, both starting up a research trajectory and doing research is the art of deploying found concepts and having them branch out through zones, bridges and joints into unexpected fields. Deleuze's claim that concepts are not floating in the air may be sound for philosophers but not for Master students of Fine Art and Design. Particularly Spatial Design students familiar with a traditional design process framed in the series concept-analysis-construction question the fabrication of concepts – although they are aware that a research concept differs from a design concept. Fortunately, that framed design series is diverging today into a flexible, fluid one "incorporating perpetual feedback between analysis, intervention and exchange with the environment" in the design process.¹²

So, how could the above listed concepts and ingredients branch out into a map or a diagram for a research project? Where are their environments creating a process of perpetual feedback? How could they, in line with Deleuze's vocalist, link to all kinds of unexpected fields? That could be illuminated by one of the examples – in fact my own *Perception and the Lines of Light*. The concepts branched out into the following series of fields, names, literature, and further concepts, producing a map or diagram for further research:

Digital splines – Nox, Lars Spuybroek, architecture.

Compactified information – Super String theory.

Speed of light – Einstein, Paul Virilio's concept of dromoscopy, physics.

Pulsating pixel points – William Gibson's first sentence in *Neuromancer*, science fiction, popular culture.

Dissymmetric layers – Deleuze's *Repetition and Difference*, philosophy.

And even our Italian Spaghetti with White Truffle Oil branched out into a research diagram:

1 pound of spaghetti – Italian 14th-century and 15th-century painting, art history

4 oz. of butter – the European milk price crises, economics.

Parmesan cheese – European policy of domestic cheeses, political science.

4 oz. of spinach – Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra*, soil contamination, illegal waste dump, criminology.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze *Negotiations* (1995) : 25
New York: Columbia University Press

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari *What is
Philosophy?* (1994) : 2 London: Verso

¹² Rahim, Ali in *The Architecture of Variation*
(2009) : 41 Lars Spuybroek (ed.), London:
Thames and Hudson.



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4 oz. of Porcini – mushrooming Cloud Cultures, open source phenomena.
 White Truffle Olive Oil Urbani – olive oil industry, sustainability, Design.

Annette W. Balkema

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Let's go back to Deleuze's vocalist as "anyone doing research into sound or the voice in fields as varied as theater, song, cinema, audiovisual media (...)." Deleuze makes his claim in passing in the context of a shift in research in linguistics he notices where "language is coming to be seen as an activity, so the abstract units and constants of language-use are becoming less and less important. It is a good thing, this current direction of research, precisely because it makes possible convergences and collaborations between novelists, linguists, philosophers, 'vocalists' ... and so on."¹³

¹³ Gilles Deleuze Negotiations (1995) : 28

Deleuze's vocalist connects both a challenging crowd of research sources and a crowd of collaborating researchers promoting early forms of crowdsourcing – sharing knowledge while producing with like-minded peers – and forms of sourcecrowding. Also Deleuze and Guattari's first sentences in *A Thousand Plateaus* could be read as another urge for collaboration and crowdsourcing and sourcecrowding in fields "closest as well as farthest away". They claim, "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away."¹⁴

New York: Columbia University Press

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari *A Thousand*

At *maHKU* we invite our Design and Fine Art students to read that first sentence in *A Thousand Plateaus* – and indulge further in the text. We like them to be inspired by their peers – Editorial designers, Fashion designers, Interior designers, Public Space designers and Visual artists. We like our students to explore and investigate that wide range of fields "closest as well as farthest away" from their own field. We like crowdsourcing and sourcecrowding. So, doing research could indeed be Deleuzean where students as researchers depart from the question of "What is Cooking" and interconnect a research trajectory while sourcecrowding and crowdsourcing. But how do we deal, then, with the current buzzword dissemination? For answering that question we need to cross that mobile bridge of swarming and travel from the realm of doing research into the realm of doing dissemination.

Plateaus (1990) : 3 London: The Athlone Press

DOING DISSEMINATION – THE BUTTERFLY, THE CLOUD, AND THE RESEARCHER In *Dissemination*, Derrida refers to swarming and a swarm of bees in the context of the movement of dissemination where language is deployed to elucidate such a flowing movement. "Language becomes that state of beginning speaking up from all sides, whose soundless effects are immediately going to reverberate on that linguistic hinge or pivot: comparison", Derrida assentingly quotes Sollers *Numbers*, a textual tissue weaving through *Dissemination*.¹⁵ Dissemination and interconnectivity could encounter through a mobile bridge in order to speak up from all sides but they cannot simply be compared. Therefore, let's reload the swarm, that "motif" or "focal point of condensation" as "sites of passage" – a Derridean vocabulary connected to concepts in order to prevent them "to be elevated into a master-word or a master-concept" – and see what that brings about.¹⁶ We must cancel the bee and fill the movement of swarming with butterflies. What does a reloaded swarm filled with butterflies tell us?

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida *Dissemination* (1981) : 335

London: Continuum

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida *Positions* (1982) : 40, 57

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

There are several butterflies all linked with movement and motion. There is a butterfly associated with systems. Not Deleuzian open systems of interconnectivity, but systems connected with chain reactions – more like Derridean-style disseminating and streaming chains. There is a butterfly in chaos theory creating the metaphor of the “butterfly effect” pointing to the notion of *sensitive dependence* in initial conditions where “small differences in the initial condition of a dynamical system may produce large variations in the long term behavior of the system.” There is a poetic butterfly whose flapping wing could produce tiny changes in the atmosphere altering, delaying, accelerating or preventing the path of a tornado. That poetic butterfly was once summarized as *Does the flap of a butterfly’s wing in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?* There is a slow motion butterfly polymorphing into fascinating patterns of variation and coloration. It must have been the butterfly’s flapping wing that created an atmospheric transformation in the digital world. Without noticing, without knowing, we moved from interconnecting digital superhighways to clouds of bits of information hovering above our real and virtual worlds disseminating into cloud cultures and cloudcomputing – a paradigm move from client-server to Internet-based computing.¹⁷ One could get retro-minded and point to cloud control – but that sounds like a space oddity connected with Major Tom and ground control. To Marcusean one-dimensional beehive minds shrunken by continuous Twittering and Hyving. To Freudian personalities imprisoned in their Facebook Ego’s. But that is not the world where our current generation of researchers live. They live in a world sensitive to the flapping wing of the butterfly – sometimes causing tiny changes, sometimes tornadoes. They relate to the soft motion and movement of morphing in cloud cultures where clouds morph from the cumulonimbus, to the cumulus fractus, or the cirrus uncinus. They start out as Deleuzian vocalists answering the question of *What is Cooking?* with diagrams, trajectories, and maps. But ultimately they create blogs with disseminating, polymorphing chains of topics where Asimov’s strip switchers, Gadamer’s “Relevance of the Beautiful”, and Algorithmic Behavior could be issues disseminating in a game-shaped blog.¹⁸ All those topics, all those patterns entail fleeting clouds of information.

We have left our speeding, interconnecting, digital information superhighways. We are softly floating – at least for a while – in fleeting, digital, morphing clouds disseminating polymorphic forms of information.

¹⁷ www.counterpoint-online.org,see Charles Leadbeater *Cloud Culture*¹⁸ www.everdienbreken.org/game

Renée Green

HAIL THE INVISIBLE COLLEGE:

REASON'S SENSE OF HUMOR

FROM WHAT POSITION DO I SPEAK? EXPERT? ARTIST? CONCEPTUAL? MEDIA AVATAR? From what position do I speak? I do think that question is relevant in this present time of Web 3.0, a time of producers (producer-users), rather than prosumers (producer-consumers), the previous Web 2.0 mode of a decade ago, hailed by the u.s.-produced internationally distributed media organ *Time* magazine when in 2007 it announced that, “The Person of the Year 2007 is YOU!” Capital letters, exclamation mark.¹ Declaring one’s point of view seems to be all that is necessary in the present, especially online, so what distinguishes what one person says from another? Belief systems?

In any case, I speak having been immersed during the past five years in what is called the San Francisco Bay Area in California now ten years after the dot-com bust, yet with plenty of techno fallout and techno lust. This is a particular reference point for this area as Apple, Google, Oracle, Facebook, and Pixar, are all based in this region and Silicon Valley is nearby. How many people here in the audience have an iPad? (No one raised their hands). Advertisements for these, supposedly appealing to projected demographics, saturate the billboards seen from streets and highways of this locality. It is still a locality with physical material conditions, despite a mediatization that would imply life exists primarily via various sized screens wherever one is.

The forms of address regarding the questions and concerns I received for this conference signal Enlightenment models of reasoned address that may be akin to parliamentary forms of address at odds with a context of combined aggressive individualistic or atomistic dispersal and driven connectivity via advertising and “life-style” forms, physical and virtual or online, which I have just described. These promotional forms surround the place I inhabit and traverse. I believe these forms also occur elsewhere, perhaps in different degrees. I suggest that understanding more about this mixture of forces – Silicon Valley, research and universities, military spending and universities, a global economic crash, many people’s desires worldwide and capital circulation, and questions of sanctuary for critical artistic practices, for example – be thought together, as acknowledging these paradoxical intersections is relevant to our discussion.

We might also think together about these three things: the notion of the expert, the notion of the artist, and the notion of Conceptual art, as I think each relate in some way to what we are discussing in terms of imagining something called “artistic research”, another designation to be returned to.

WHAT THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IS PURPORTED TO BRING & QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BASED ON OTHER MODELS

“The academy strikes back”, “the empire strikes back” – provocative

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¹ Claudia K. Grinnell From Consumer to

Prosumer to Producer: Who Keeps Shifting

My Paradigm? (We Do!) (Fall 2009) : 584

Public Culture, vol. 21, no. 3



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titles: what are the stakes and the positionings, who is striking what? Perhaps we could consider the following question as a provocative and possibly enabling refrain or mantra: *Given our complex situations and conditions what is generative for thinking, creation, and action in the present?*

If the academy represents institutionalized knowledge and its formations, artists have historically fought against academicization, but what is different in the present scenario that we are attempting to articulate and analyze? What are the roles being enacted and where is power and knowledge being assigned? What conditions have changed?

The questions posed for this conference are compelling ones that I will address in my circuitous narrative, as I point to some paradoxes, provocations and further questions that I hope will generate thought and discussion. Am I an expert? What might I be an expert of? What can expertise now signify? What does it allow and entail? How is it determined? How does it matter? How does it matter in relationship to art? To research? To research in relation to art? In what kind of relation?

The question of expertise is a crucial question for the theme of “striking back” and the institutionalization of knowledge and how this is currently deployed particularly in relation to what we call art. This will also require some examination and definition, especially as art, despite forms of interdisciplinarity, is peripherally positioned in relation to other disciplinary areas in research universities; in these, science is the guiding form for reason as well as for forms of evaluation regarding what is viable and what should be supported. I will return to the notions of viability and supportability in relation to art – as we now define it. How it is defined remains a question. Witness debates between faculty regarding viable curricula for an art school of the present, for example. How is expertise granted now and what and who benefits from this designation? Is it primarily a bourgeois notion that can be compared to other 19th century discipline designations and invented standards meant to shore up professional territories to function as filters, or an aspiration for a consensus to agree upon quality? A post-DIY regression? Can we think more carefully about education and capitalism and how these have affected each other nationally and transnationally? At present, during the current economic collapse, this is particularly prescient. But some stories and histories may help move the narrative I am composing along.

SOME FORMATIONS. SOME CONTEXTS I have spent seven years in the U.S. since leaving the Academy of Fine Art in Vienna. Reflecting on the encounters related to education during this period may be of interest in the process of imagining future directions. Seeking a territory to enact what may be imagined as a further possibility for “artistic research” was an objective.

As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari remind in *What Is Philosophy?*, “We need to see how everyone, at every age, in the smallest things as in the greatest challenges, seeks a territory, tolerates or carries out deterritorializations, and is reterritorialized on almost anything – memory, fetish, or dream.”² In thinking about the past years, I have noted that I have been often reflecting on the notion of formations. The following titles give an indication to some of what has informed this thinking, and in particular, this presentation. The Education of Henry Adams. Sentimental Education. Ivy and Industry. Art Subjects. Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth,

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² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari *What Is Philosophy?* (1994) : 68 Columbia University Press, New York

and Practice. Reading California. Age of Extremes. The New Spirit of Capitalism. Critique of Psychoanalytic Reason.

Searching for places to enact the work of an artist-thinker continues to be a great challenge. I have now tested this possibility in different locations, from the University of California in Santa Barbara (UCSB), a research university, to a private art institute, as well as with different independent study programs. Part of what has been necessary in this endeavor of enactment has involved facing difficult evidence and addressing serious questions regarding how research is defined and perceived in all these different milieus – research university, art academies, art schools/institutes/colleges, independent studies programs.

An interesting definition of artistic research that can be contemplated and further probed has been developed by Sha Xin Wei, Canada Research Chair, Media Arts and director of Topological Media Lab at Concordia University in Montréal. In *Art Research*, he describes how art research differs from other forms of research:

Research in the arts is quite different from research in engineering, which in turn is different from scientific research.

It is more akin to the humanities in its attention to the particular rather than the systemic, but it creates knowledge via aesthetic as well as critical inquiry, and engages material and embodied experience as well as concepts.

Like other modes of research, art research generates portable knowledge: it generates insights, how-to's, why's that can be shared by more than one individual; what is learned in the context of one art project can be applied in a different one. Like research in other domains, art research has its own archive, but whereas historians use textual archives, and anthropologists use materials gathered in fieldwork, art research's "body of literature" is the body of prior works and the critical commentaries surrounding them. Like other research, art research is open-ended, we cannot declare in advance what is the "deliverable": if we already know the answer, then we would not need to do the research.

Art research is not the same as art practice. Why should that be the case? Not every artist shares her or his working knowledge with her or his peers, nor need she or he do so. Art practices range widely, and a large part of their vitality comes from their autonomous ways of making.³

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³ *Sha Xin Wei Art Research?* (December

2008) *Concordia University, Montréal.*

Unpublished manuscript.

VARIOUS HISTORIES Analyzing experiences in education and art in the U.S. through a historical lens and from a distance as an artist-as-distanciation, even if temporary, is one of the historically distinguishing possibilities of being an artist and a thinker aided by creating and writing works and making presentations such as this. Looking at the conditions of artists past and present is part of this examination that has been possible and generative. Given that "artistic research" is little valued in the composition of what has institutional meaning (monetary revenue being of prime concern), and based on lack of support of various kinds, it was necessary to develop an institute within an institute to create sufficient temporary autonomy to experience the desired knowledge-pleasure

'sanctuary', if even for one day a week. This was enacted for five years via *Spheres of Interest: Experiments in Thinking and Action*, a graduate seminar and lecture series that allowed encounters with questions of meaning and engagement and that functioned as an adaptation of an invisible college.⁴

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NOMADIC AND HOMELESS: CONCEPTUAL ART AND SOME

CONSEQUENCES The notion of an invisible college references "An Invisible College in an Anglo-American World", an essay by Michael Corris where he provides a historical analysis of Art & Language, of which he was a part. The notion of "Conceptual art status as an art in exile" or notions of the early 1970s of Conceptual art as a manifestation of "the artist out of work" or a "homeless art of the cultural displaced" still resonate. Art & Language continues to promote the view of Conceptual art as a practice that emerged unexpectedly out of a desire to resist a notion of professional competence in art. They assert that it had become increasingly apparent to a generation of artists coming of age during the 1960s that "art objects now depended upon a framework of supporting institutions." This led them and others to the conclusion that "what was required was not so much 'works' as work on the circumstances of work. The problem became a search for ways to 'go on'."⁵

⁴ Spheres of Interest Blog

spheresofinterest.blogspot.com

Exploring the history of the term "invisible college" is useful in understanding the duration and permutations of the ideas related to it and how these resurgences can be understood in relation to the topic of "artistic research", reexaminations of Conceptual art, and recurring notions of the commons.

⁵ Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth and Practice

(2004) : 2 Edited by Michael Corris,

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

"The idea of an invisible college became influential in 17th-century Europe, in particular, in the form of a network of savants or intellectuals exchanging ideas. This is an alternative model to that of the learned journal, dominant in the 19th century. The invisible college idea is exemplified by the network of astronomers, professors, mathematicians, and natural philosophers in 16th-century Europe. Men such as Johannes Kepler, Georg Joachim Rheticus, John Dee, and Tycho Brahe passed information and ideas to each other in an invisible college. One of the most common methods used to communicate was through marginalia, annotations written in personal copies of books that were loaned, given, or sold. (...) The term now refers mainly to the free transfer of thought and technical expertise, usually carried out without the establishment of designated facilities or institutional authority, spread by a loosely connected system of word-of-mouth referral or localized bulletin-board system, and supported through barter (i.e. trade of knowledge or services) or apprenticeship. In earlier times the term also included certain Hegelian aspects of secret societies and occultism (...). The invisible college is akin to the old guild system, yet holds no sway in recognized scholastic, technical or political circles. It is merely an attempt to circumvent bureaucratic or monetary obstacles by knowledgeable individuals and civic groups. Said entities generally feel a need to share their methods with fellow journeymen, so to speak,



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and to strengthen local techniques through collaboration.

Members of an invisible college are often today called independent scholars.”⁶

In thinking further today about the idea of an “invisible college”, Corris offered the following observation, made in the context of a reflection on the way the knowledge economy embraces communication at a distance, which suggests the requirement by concerned parties for a tactical move in the direction of face-to-face contact. “The only program that is ethical, in my view, is one that has *nothing to do with the pedagogical model of the academy* (...) even “invisible college” presumes too much these days, as we *harvest our atomic friends*. There is good reason to *keep the dream of collectivity alive*.”⁷

In all of these ruminations it seems necessary to remember the relationships to art, in its fullness and possible profundity, as its possibility was most likely the initial magnet for engaging at all with an endeavor now being described as “artistic research”. This includes the history of Conceptual art and its debates. Such exemplary examples like Art & Language, the Whitney Independent Study Program, Maumaus School of Visual Arts, and the publications and related materials now becoming more available demonstrate moments of rigorous research related to art, aesthetics, politics, culture, and contact, focussed on particular histories and debates pertaining to art in its most complex sense. I have noted that this kind of specificity to historical reference often falls out of discussions and projects in art schools and art programs when research is promoted without the above-mentioned framework or formation, to the disadvantage of both the endeavors of art and of research. From my perspective as an artist, following the trajectories of Douglas Huebler and Thomas Lawson – both Deans at Cal Arts – continuing to make work, making the school part of the “artistic research”, and developing works inspired by these paradoxes and complexities has been enriching.

Critical choices are still possible amidst a barrage of options and in spite of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which is something I first encountered at UCSB when students began describing their “disability” implying they would need special attention devoted to them by me as an instructor.

I learned more about these designations and symptoms while working and living in California, a place where new humans have emerged in circumstances about as distant as can be imagined from Kant’s intellectual formation and existence, something to consider when thinking about how we consider reason and its applications and how these can now be received.

IVY AND INDUSTRY SHORTFALL: A CONUNDRUM OF INCREASED PUBLIC FUNDING NEED VERSUS INCREASED RELIANCE ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR In discussing the present, it is necessary to understand the genealogy affecting current structures in terms of higher education. One significant difference between Anglo-American models and the European system is that profit has been a major impetus in the organization of higher education in the U.S.⁸ I am somewhat reductive while sketching this in very broad strokes, but what I am outlining are indications of what can be recognized in relation to the current conditions under discussion. This is not surprising if the larger history of the “new world” is considered in terms of European mercantile expansion, which in the present we can think about as historically different, yet analogous to globalization. It is important to recognize this, especially when we discuss

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⁶ Invisible College. English Wikipedia entry

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invisible_College

Corris references the historical “invisible college” in his 1973 text, *The Fine Structure of Collaboration* (September 1972) published in *Art-Language*, vol. 2, no. 3

⁷ Private correspondence with the author,

May 19th, 2010 and July 4th, 2010

⁸ Christopher Newfield, *Ivy and Industry: Business and the Making of the American University, 1880-1980* (2003), *Duke University Press*

what it is possible to realize and what the stakes have been to create situations where ideas and creation can flourish.

Ideas have been possible, but always in a state of embattlement at someone's cost, and this continues, although the stakes are now higher.

This is part of what is unseen or forgotten, yet becomes apparent when one probes the history of even the most esteemed U.S. thinkers. Partly this can be traced to a tension between an evasion of modern European philosophy (Emerson's transcendentalism) and projective Manifest Destiny. The struggles to create spaces for knowledge, investigation, and creativity have been primarily linked in the U.S. to industrial and military purposes – and paradoxically also with humanist goals – thus the recurring pragmatic dimension suggested by the title *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* by Cornel West.

My perspective is influenced by the times we live in and the evidence that is unavoidable. This is particularly apparent now in the State of California, an imagined paradise for various reasons, among which its system of public higher education embodied by the University of California, until now a site for a proliferation of invention and research, and a knowledge creation base for artists who may be particularly esteemed and emulated for having instigated what can be considered numerous forms of "artistic research". Artists included are Allan Kaprow, Eleanor Antin, David Antin, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, Paul McCarthy, John Baldassari, Chip Lord, Babette Mangolte, Steve Fagin, Bruce Yonemoto, Trinh T. Minh-ha and in more recent years Mary Kelly, Barbara Kruger, Teddy Cruz, Yvonne Rainer, Kyong Park, and Trevor Paglen, to name a scant few.

But there is the myth and there are the conditions. To understand the dynamic of the struggle I am describing, a historical analysis of ways artists have attempted to develop platforms within research universities would be needed and this is too cumbersome an investigation for this presentation. Instead I have engaged in discussions with artists and colleagues involved in research and in art who have shared data (another keyword) and investigated further in order to develop some ideas regarding what seems possible – given the financial circumstances. Private funding even dominates the public higher education sector in California, as well as that of private educational institutions in addition to the revenue generated from tuition, which has been continually increased while infrastructural needs and academic delivery have declined.

Social geographer Gray Brechin has noted that public education and the concept of the public good have not been advocated since the advent of both the Reagan and Thatcher regimes. Using the University of California (UC) as his example, Brechin notes that in 1967 the public university was free. Now mere tuition is roughly \$10,000 per year. The listed UC Berkeley graduate student expenses for California residents per year is \$34,286 and \$49,526 for non-residents. He describes how the notion that the marketplace should be applied to the public trust increased during Reagan's tenure. He notes that "if the University of California goes down", this is not simply a U.S. symptom or issue, but rather something of worldwide significance as it has been a model of what a public research university can effect in the world.

The processes of privatization have been in motion for sometime though, as private individuals and corporations supplanted the public

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contribution to the university and in the process have affected the kind of work that gets done. The first big invasion, Brechin observes, was enacted toward the UC in the 1990s by Novartis, a chemical agricultural company, and more recently by British Petroleum, with a 500 million dollar “donation”. He states the ensuing processes, “In turn the curriculum becomes radically skewed, because it has its own gravitational field based on the influence of the investors.” The belief that there is no alternative, he insists, is not true. This was disproved, he claims, by lessons learned – and since forgotten – during the New Deal. As a means to challenge a depressing perception of stuckness, Brechin continues to explore the earlier California history in the Living New Deal Project as a means to utilize other models of what can be possible in the present.⁹

These observations regarding higher education in California and the deficit toward the public are further stated by Christopher Newfield in, “Avoiding the Coming Higher Ed Wars.” From his perspective in 2010 he states,

I am going to focus on what Californians learned in the last year: that higher education leaders are still unable to demonstrate the necessity of rebuilding public funding (...). [W]e need to appreciate the structural nature of the funding crisis. California’s appalling decline predated the most recent cuts and was produced not by economic downturns but by the American funding model that has reshaped higher education over the past thirty years. The United States relied on low tuition to ensure mass access when it led the world in measures of educational quality and attainment. The American model, however, depends on private funds from students and their families to a greater extent than any other national funding model, and U.S. colleges and universities now charge some of the highest tuitions in the world.

The American funding model has done well at raising tuition and donations and poorly at raising educational attainment. Having the best of both worlds – families willing to pay a premium to send their children to elite colleges and taxpayers willing to provide generous public funding – held the model together. While public funding was high, public universities could function as part of one differentiated but still relatively integrated and generally superior tertiary system. But public funding per student has been flat or falling for nearly thirty years, and this has gradually eroded quality and affordability for the 80% of college and university students who attend public institutions. Recent drastic cuts now threaten to make U.S. higher education a tale of two systems: one rich, one poor, much like our mediocre K-12 schools.

The California experience needs to be pondered carefully. It reveals the unvarnished truth that the American funding model is not a synthesis of opposites, but a now unraveling self-contradiction. That is because its success on one side causes its failure on the other: its success with private funding, especially with tuition increases, has helped reduce public funding.¹⁰

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⁹ Raw Deal for Education: Against the Grain:

A Program about Politics and Culture, (May

14th 2010) www.againstthegrain.org *Califo*

¹⁰ www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2010

CONCLUSION The importance of creating working bases, nodes and networks with others to be able to work, think, and create – beyond corporatized social networks, even when we labor within corporatized universities and art schools – is an inventive necessity akin to what Isabelle Stengers suggests in her phrase, “reason’s sense of humor”, which she describes as an example of “new ways of working together”. She mentions this in relation to her collaboration with Léon Chertok and the heretical positions they may have both been assigned in their fields. He as a psychoanalyst challenging the basis of the psychoanalytic institution and she as an epistemologist who continues to raise questions and, [W]ho does not believe that we know – or even that we can know – what reason might be capable of. Stengers sees in the epistemological discourses on the singularity of modern science a futile effort to found on principle what is clearly a historical fact, namely, that in certain fields and under certain conditions humans have discovered a new and history-producing way of working together. This position opposes her not only to other epistemologists, but also to all scientists and critics of science who feel the need of conferring an identity on science. Usually this identity is intended to justify – or condemn – as inevitable categories, and what remains, which is only a subjective appearance. That this split can be *justified* “in the name of science” or “in the name of reason” and not *evaluated* in its risks and relevance is for her an indication of what remains to be invented: new ways of working together, or what might be called “reason’s sense of humor”.¹¹

One such example I recall of a sort of collaborative experiment, that can be thought in relation to artistic research even if it was not designated as such, occurred in an arranged meeting between Isabelle Stengers, Friedrich Kittler, Penelope Georgiou, and myself in Vienna on 1993. The meeting was organized by several people, Diedrich Diedrichsen, Stephan Geene, Stella Rollig, Sabeth Buchman, and Jutta Koether, who were then evidently interested in exploring what I would interpret as “reason’s sense of humor”. The combination of guest participants was originally meant to include Félix Guattari, who passed away before we could convene. The event was an attempt to create a different form of engagement by means of experimentation. The physical arrangement of creating a non-hierarchical seating not based on the proscenium between the guest participants and the audience, for example. Or immediate reactions to film clips, in addition to on the spot reactions to questions. Improvisatory, as well as intuitive modes, based on the diverse forms of knowledge convened.

Stenger further elaborates on these possibilities, in her description of the Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari working combination, which I interpret as an instantiation of potential, enacted via “reason’s sense of humor” or the bracing challenge of thinking with an other. One way or another, when Deleuze did encounter Guattari, the problem did change. The philosopher is no longer thinking by proxy but together with what Americans call an activist, the untiring actor, thinker, cartographer and connector of collective processes of deterritorialisation, of creations of collective assemblages of enunciation, that are less against capitalism than produced in an affirmative experimental process of escape from both the plane of capital and the plane of subjection. Thinking with Guattari excluded the subjective, depressive complaint – how to be a

¹¹ *Léon Chertok and Isabelle Stengers Critique of Psychoanalytic Reason: Hypnosis as a Scientific Problem from Lavoisier to Lacan (1992)* : xxii
Stanford: University Press

philosopher in front of solitary heroes, whose ordeal, beyond the limits of sense, may inspire shame to the one who remains on the bank, commenting. Indeed the point was no longer, could no longer be, how to rejoin Artaud – for whom writing was writing “for” the illiterate, “for” the agonizing rat, or the slaughtered calf which did not mean he identified himself with an illiterate, a rat or a calf. The point is becoming and a becoming is always double.¹²

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¹² *Isabelle Stengers* Gilles Deleuze’s last message

www.recalcitrance.com/deleuzelast.htm

I can recall many different experiments with knowledge and art that can be listed as artistic research, a necessarily broad designation, despite our specific developing definitions. Understanding the potential of our various operations and understanding the continuing efforts needed to create and enact nodes of knowledge, in spite of the obstacles that exist, is crucial – soul sustaining rather than soul killing.

Dieter Lesage

ON SUPPLEMENTALITY

The title of this conference, *The Academy Strikes Back*, is an interesting one in more than one sense.¹ In fact, the title is a mix of the title of my 2009 *e-flux journal* essay “The Academy is Back” and the title of George Lucas’ *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*. From an intergalactic distance, it may seem at first that what this catchy conference title is trying to do is just pimping up an academic event by *faire d’oeil* to a famous phenomenon of popular culture we believe we all know or we cannot admit not to know without losing all credibility as people of our Imperial Times. – You know how hard it is to catch people’s attention when it comes to serious matters. – However, upon closer inspection, the issue here may be a very different one and that is to present a movie such as *The Empire Strikes Back*, this well-known product of popular culture, as something different than pure entertainment, namely as the presentation and communication of the results of artistic research. Not how to make serious matters popular, but how to see the seriousness of popular matters seems to be the question – or at least one way of putting the question of the presentation of artistic research.

Indeed, strange as it may sound, the links between the blockbuster movie *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and the Academy are so numerous that the film itself could already have been titled *The Academy Strikes Back*. First of all, after the success of the movie *Star Wars* from 1977, which subsequently would be subtitled *Episode IV: A New Hope*, George Lucas decided not to direct the sequel himself, but to ask one of his former professors at the University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television, Irving Kershner, to direct *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*. The production story of *The Empire Strikes Back* is about a successful young movie director who asked a former professor to direct the sequel to his first *Star Wars* movie. At first, the professor got very nervous about this proposal, because he believed that his sequel would never be as good as the first movie his ex-student made. Nevertheless, the ex-student managed to convince his former professor to accept the job, with the great result we all know or cannot admit not to know.

With the movie *The Empire Strikes Back*, you see what great achievements professors are capable of, if only they are supported by their students. This anecdote not only reveals the importance George Lucas gave and, as his former school’s most important donor, still gives to his educational background, but it could also direct us to a reading of movies such as the different *Star Wars* episodes, no matter how unlikely, as eminent examples of artistic research which, as in the case of *Star Wars*, may even find their background in an academic context. The artistic references of the most famous space opera movie director and producer were both *cinéma vérité* and abstract and experimental movie makers, such as, among others, Stan Brakhage and Bruce Conner whose work George Lucas became acquainted with during his academic studies at the USC School of Cinema-Television.

¹ This is the text of a lecture presented at the conference ‘The Academy Strikes Back’, organised by the European Artistic Research Network at the Hogeschool Sint-Lukas in Brussels on June 4-5, 2010. This text elaborates some points of my essay ‘The Academy is Back: On Education, the Bologna Process, and the Doctorate in the Arts’, *e-flux journal*, no4, March 2009. It also owes a lot to a discussion after my lecture at the Institut für Transdisziplinarität der Hochschule der Künste in Bern, Switzerland, on September 23, 2009 and my lecture, with Ina Wudtke, at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge (Ma.), USA, on November 3, 2009.

I would like to thank Prof. Ute Meta Bauer, Prof. Florian Dombois and Dr. Yebooa Ofose as well as the participants at both discussions, for their stimulating comments and questions.



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As much as one can see what is “academic” about *The Empire Strikes Back*, one can see what is “imperial” about “the back-striking Academy”.

What exactly makes people say that the Academy strikes back?

In order to understand this, we have to move from California to Emilia-Romagna, from Los Angeles to Bologna. In the early years of the so-called Bologna Process, which was launched in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration by European Ministers of Higher Education, the primary interest lay with the introduction of the bachelor and master cycles in higher education institutions of all the participating countries in Europe.

One of the official reasons for launching the Bologna Process was the heterogeneous organization of European higher education, as it used to be structured in very different ways in all European countries. Not only were there almost as many titles of degrees as there were European countries, there were also considerable differences in workload between similar studies in different countries. In order to strengthen the transnational mobility of students, teachers, researchers, and academic workers throughout Europe, a basic common structure for higher education study courses in Europe seemed to be required, one that would allow for the transnational comparability, acceptability and validity of university degrees. It would allow academics with a degree obtained in Sweden or Finland to apply for a job in France. It would allow students with a Spanish Bachelor’s Degree to continue their Master Studies in the Netherlands. It would allow people with an Italian Master’s Degree to apply for a doctoral grant in the UK. It was even said that transnational mobility would become an integral part of the study path of a European student, according to the slogan “Bachelor at home, Master abroad”.

After having obtained a Bachelor’s Degree in one’s home country, the typical European student would leave her/his home country for at least one year in order to obtain a Master’s Degree in another country.²

Through its philosophy of enhanced mobility, the Bologna Process presented itself as a tool for improving international relations and strengthening intercultural understanding. In its choice of the titles “Bachelor” and “Master” as the names of the first two cycles of university studies throughout Europe, continental European higher education was also obviously conforming itself to the existing structure of Anglo-American higher education. European policy makers must have thought that the best way for Europe to become the world’s largest knowledge economy in 2010, as the so-called Lisbon Strategy demands, was to imitate some of the features of its main competitor.

With the German sociologist Richard Münch, and against the self-promoting narrative of mobility and multiculturalism of the Bologna Process, we hold the idea that the Bologna Process is launched mainly to serve capitalist interests, rather than intrinsic academic or scientific needs.³ However, we also believe that it is possible to redirect the Bologna Process away from capitalist interests. If Karl Marx could say that capitalism was better than feudalism, if Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their worldwide communist bestseller published by Harvard University Press could say that Empire is better than the nation-state, then one can say that Bologna’s “academic capitalism”, as Richard Münch calls it, is better than Europe’s former academic feudalism.⁴ By saying – in a way that is intentionally as provocative as Marx’ “plea” for capitalism – that Bologna’s academic capitalism is better than pre-

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² Klaus Jung Was fordert Kunsthochschulen

heraus? in: *Internationale Gesellschaft der Bildenden Künste (IGBK) anette hollywood & Barbara Wille (Hrsg.) who is afraid of master of arts? (2007) : 36-37 Berlin IGBK*

³ Richard Münch, *Globale Eliten, lokale Autoritäten Bildung und Wissenschaft unter dem Regime von PISA (2009) McKinsey & Co, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp*

⁴ Antonio Negri & Michael Hardt *Empire (2000) Cambridge (Mass.) Harvard University Press*

Bologna academic feudalism, we see Bologna as a machine that destroys idiosyncratic national educational structures that do not necessarily serve the interests of the students, nor of the teachers and researchers. It is true that the Bologna Process establishes a kind of academic Empire, constituted by a growing transnational network of academic institutions and its sub-networks, such as the European Artistic Research Network, which hosts this conference. Nevertheless, the best way to defeat Bologna is to allow it to try to establish itself. The very same transnational multitude of students, teachers and researchers who since a few years find themselves in similar situations and whom the Bologna newspeak has provided with a whole new vocabulary they can use to share their experiences beyond national boundaries, may at one point or another redirect the capitalist orientation of the Bologna Process. As a matter of fact, the pressure of transnational student bodies has already been effective in pushing European higher education policy makers to adopt a more social implementation of the whole Process.⁵ And I trust that the European Artistic Research Network too could constitute itself as a rebellious faction and will not give in to the dark side of the Force.

With the meeting of the Bologna Follow-Up Group in Berlin in 2003, the third cycle leading to the doctorate became a priority of European higher education policy. With the growing focus of the Bologna Process on the third cycle, the idea of a doctorate in the arts also emerged. It seemed logical that, if artistic study courses had to conform to the structure of bachelor and master cycles, it would be necessary to create a third cycle of artistic study courses in order to obtain a doctorate in the arts. Indeed, as of 2003, in most European countries, the doctorate or Ph.D. in the arts did not yet exist. In the years that followed, academic institutions in many European countries decided to establish a doctorate in the arts.

Meanwhile, the doctorate in the arts has become the subject of heated discussions.⁶ First of all, there is the existential question many people ask: Why should there be a doctorate in the arts, rather than nothing? Weren't we happy without it? It is no secret that many people see neither the socio-economic necessity nor the artistic relevance of a doctorate in the arts. There is fierce opposition to it from people within higher arts education, universities, and the arts field – at least in so far as it still makes sense to draw a clear-cut distinction between higher arts education, universities, and the arts. Secondly, once you accept the possibility of a doctorate in the arts, there is the formal question of what form the doctorate in the arts should take. Indeed, a defense of the doctorate in the arts is only an institutional condition of a possibility for the defense of a doctorate in the arts. A doctorate in the arts will always be defended according to a certain concept of the doctorate in the arts laid out in rules that have previously been defended within the responsible university or faculty board or council. As a matter of fact, the latter kind of defense might turn out to be as exhausting as the defense of a doctorate as such. It will continue to demand a good deal of struggle in order to establish that the doctorate in the arts meets artistic – rather than merely academic – requirements and expectations.

So first of all there is the existential question whether there should be a doctorate in the arts or Ph.D. in the arts at all. Against the voices who oppose the doctorate in the arts as such, we defend the idea of a doctorate in the arts. Our belief in the legitimacy of the doctorate in the

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⁵ For a quite different version of our argument, see my essay 'Who's Afraid of Artistic Research?' in: *Dieter Lesage & Kathrin Busch (eds.), A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher: The Academy and the Bologna Process (2007)*: 84-93 AS#179, *Antwerp, MuHKA*

⁶ In order to be accepted as a participating country in the Bologna Process, nation states don't have to be a Member state of the European Union. According to the Berlin Communiqué of September 19, 2003, all European countries that signed the European Cultural Convention, accept the basic premises of the Bologna Declaration, and strive to implement the Process at the national level, can become participating countries in the Bologna Process. The current number of countries participating in the Bologna Process is forty-six. San Marino and Monaco, two more countries that signed the European Cultural Convention, are not participating in the Bologna Process for lack of higher education institutions.

arts as a third cycle in higher arts education, analogous to third cycles of scientific study courses, is based on our understanding of the artist as a researcher in his or her own right. In a very basic sense, to portray the artist as a researcher is one way to problematise a still widespread popular understanding of art as merely irreflexive, spontaneous, intuitive, etc. This shouldn't lead us to think that intuition or spontaneity are not constitutive of research, whether scientific or artistic. Rather it should remind us of the fact that decisive moments of intuition that may lead to scientific discoveries or artistic creations only occur within a long horizon of time spent on careful reflection, patient investigation, rigorous experimentation. There is no doubt that flashes of insight, moments of vision or whatever one may call them, occasionally may lead to a dazzling acceleration of artistic or scientific processes. It is understandable that the spectacular character of these moments captures the imagination of outsiders more than the boring rituals of the artistic or scientific profession that they may interrupt, but there is no doubt either that a popular fixation on these moments, how constitutive and important they may be, has led to a considerably distorted portrait of the artist as well as of the scientist in popular imagination. It may well be that, as far as the artist is concerned, the hegemony of this popular misconception explains why until some years ago the doctorate in the arts seemed something foolish. Indeed, a long horizon of time – which is what the doctorate is in its abstraction – seemed incompatible with the idea of art as something irreflexive, spontaneous, intuitive, etc. Even today, it is a real political challenge to give artists time: most people seem to believe that to give artists time can't mean anything else but to allow them to spend even more time in the bar.

Our understanding of the artist as a researcher is not a definition we try to impose on the artist, rather it is the way many artists during the last fifty years have been describing themselves, either implicitly or explicitly. During the last five decades, artists have been describing their work as involving an investigation into..., as a research on..., even to the point where they argued that the investigation or the research process as such was artistically much more important than all its eventual output that could be produced in the form of performances, exhibitions or artworks. For those who know – and we all know – how severely researchers today are under pressure to produce output, it may be quite ironic to be reminded of the fact that the selfdescription of artists as researchers usually was accompanied by a strong opposition against tendencies to evaluate the usefulness of artistic funding through output evaluation.⁷ It seems as if artists must have thought that the image of the researcher would be helpful in order to explain that art is primarily about a process of reflection, of interrogation, of thinking, not about its eventual output. The selfdescription of the artist as researcher may have been nurtured by a romantic image of the researcher, who, entirely divested of any material interest, has all the time of the world in order to struggle with problems or questions, just for the sake of intellectual struggle and the little intrinsic pleasures that come with it. Of course, as a researcher or as someone who knows about the actual unromantic state of research today, one could take quite some cynical pleasure in the unmasking of the poor naiveté of the artist who still believes that researchers are primarily driven by an intrinsic interest in the questions and problems

⁷ On the question of measuring artistic research output, see my essay 'Who's afraid of artistic research? On measuring artistic research output' (2009) vol.2, no.2 in: *Art & Research. A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, online journal: www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/lesage.html

they are dealing with. However, one could also adopt a very different attitude and that would be to be thankful that artists, through their naive pre-neoliberal selfdescription as researchers, have in fact been trying to save the idea of the autonomous researcher. In the same vein, the institution of the doctorate in the arts could be welcomed and applauded as an incredible chance to reinstall at academies and universities a space of autonomous reflection, which seems under threat, if not already to have been lost, in the science departments of many universities, where scientists are supposed to subscribe to the idea that they are only good scientists if they are able to develop an idea that can be valorized and sold as a product on the market, ideally by spin-off firms, which will be happy to welcome the scientist as a well-earning member of its executive board. In our view, the doctorate in the arts is to be defended as a space of autonomy within an institution whose autonomy is severely under threat. To portray the artist as a researcher is nothing more, but above all also nothing less than a plea to give the artist the unproductive time needed in order to be able to become productive in an innovative way. Innovative production can only emerge within a long horizon of time. There is also the formal question of what form the doctorate in the arts should have. Although academics involved in the establishment of the rules for the doctorate in the arts did pay attention to the demand that the new doctorate should respect the specificity of an artistic education to the extent that they accepted the idea that artists present a portfolio of their work as a doctorate – many of them fiercely defended and still defend the idea that a doctorate in the arts would be and is inconceivable without a written supplement. As a result, the format of the doctorate in the arts mostly requires both an artistic portfolio and a “written supplement”. The insistence on the obligation to produce a written supplement appears to demonstrate a lack of confidence, either in the capacity of the artists to speak in a meaningful, complex, and critical way in a medium of their choosing, or in their own capacity to make sound judgments on the meaning, complexity, and criticality of artistic output as such. For this reason, I maintain the idea that the presentation of the results of artistic research in general – of which the doctorate in the arts is only one particular example – does not necessarily require an explanatory text as a supplement. For an evaluation by peers, the artwork itself (be it a theater, dance or musical performance, an installation, a film, a video, or a fashion show) which is the result of artistic research should be and is sufficient in order to evaluate its originality and relevance. Although there are notable exceptions, in most cases the demand for a supplement is voiced in a most insistent way, not by peers, but by non-peers, that is by people who are not acquainted with the arts and understandably feel insecure about its evaluation. In my experience, peers have mostly been able to evaluate in a competent and convincing way artistic research by peers, even if there wasn’t any supplementary text explaining anything. Artists, as peers, see and hear in a way non-artists cannot see and hear. Their audiovisual literacy enables them to read the artistic research that is to be evaluated, even if in a certain sense, there is nothing to read.

What might happen and what is in fact already happening – now that this mentality of requiring a supplement, which I would like to refer to as “supplementality”, is imposing itself as constitutive of the format of



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the presentation of artistic research – is that, because it complies with the long-standing format of the doctorate, juries of a doctorate in the arts will base their assessments primarily on a reading of the written supplement, as if it were the doctorate itself, at the same time being tempted to consider the artistic portfolio as merely its supplementary illustration. As a consequence, what might happen is that academically trained art historians with a hobby as an amateur photographer obtain a doctorate in the arts, merely because they are academically trained enough to produce an academically valid textual supplement to a portfolio of very doubtful photographic work that a jury refuses to judge in itself, because that would be all too subjective, while at the same time world class musicians may get into quite some formal trouble concerning their doctorate in the arts, because the textual supplement to the dozens of CDs of their work as a performer and interpreter that constitutes their portfolio does not refer in an academically prescribed way to existing musicological literature.

In opposition to these kind of aberrations, the evaluation of a doctorate in the arts, or of a master of arts for that matter, should focus on the capacity of the doctoral or master student to speak in the medium of his or her choice. And if this medium is film, or video, or painting, or sculpture, or sound, or fashion, or if the doctoral or master student wants to mix media, it will obviously require from a jury ways of reading, interpreting, and discussing other than those required by an academic text. To impose a medium on the artist is to fail to recognize the artist as an artist. An artist who wants to obtain a doctorate in the arts, or a master of arts, should be given the academic freedom to choose his or her own medium. And then it would still be possible that he or she chooses text as we ordinarily understand it as the most appropriate medium for his or her artistic purposes.

Lately, some of those who defend the idea that a doctorate in the arts should not only consist of an artistic portfolio but also of a textual supplement have been modifying their position by claiming that this textual supplement of course does not necessarily have to assume an academic form. As we are speaking of a doctorate in the arts, we should adopt a pluralist attitude towards the demand of a text as a supplement to the artistic portfolio as part of the doctorate in the arts and we could easily imagine textual supplements that assume a very artistic form. As long as it looks like text, it could be a literary text, a diary, maybe even a theater play or a series of poems. Artists who would want to defend a doctorate in the arts should not be frightened by the requirement to write an academic text. It could also be an artistic text.

In trying to preserve the requirement of the textual supplement, these defenders are in fact merely providing proof that their requirement has always been nothing but a form of bureaucratic conformism. At first we were told that the demand for a textual supplement was prompted by fear that it would be impossible to judge an artistic portfolio, not because it is a portfolio, but because it is artistic. Therefore a textual supplement was needed which could be judged more easily, because it would be more articulate. But if now the supplement itself also becomes artistic, the problem is why one thinks that it will be more easy to judge an artistic textual supplement than an artistic portfolio? The idea seems to be that artistic output can only be adequately judged if there is some form of text, academic or not, that supplements it. So we are led to believe that we need some form of text in order to decipher the artistic work of the artist who wants to become a doctor in the arts

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in order to know whether that work deserves a doctorate in the arts at all. Defenders of the textual supplement as a necessary part of the format of the doctorate in the arts may claim that they take a more intellectual or reflexive approach to the arts. Despite how selfevident this claim may seem, I would like to contest it. Indeed, this claim, I would say, cherishes a notion of text that is uninformed by the major intellectual reflections on text and, therefore, is not that reflexive or intellectual at all. The major contribution to the philosophy of text in the last five decades has been and still is the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and it seems to me that the defenders of the textual supplement as necessary part of a presentation of the results of artistic research, such as the doctorate in the arts, have not understood one word of his philosophy. It is quite interesting to note that Derrida's philosophy of text was in fact born out of a pragmatic reflection on how to write a doctoral thesis. With the story of this reflection, we re-cross the Atlantic, to end up on the East Coast this time. Indeed, as a matter of fact, Derrida's struggle with this question began in Massachusetts.

In 1956-1957, the young French philosopher who had just earned his *agrégation* at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, came to the United States for the first time in his life and spend a year in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a grant to study at Harvard University. Mentioning – always briefly – Jacques Derrida's year in Massachusetts, many of his biographers attribute him with the strange-sounding status of a “special auditor” at Harvard University. Harvard University may indeed have a firm-like reputation that was, fortunately only to a limited extent, deconstructed by last year's financial crisis, but Derrida did not, when he came, come to check its balances, which is what an “auditor” and especially a “special” one, usually does. As Geoffrey Bennington wrote in *Derridabase*, Derrida came to Massachusetts to check the microfilm archives of Husserl's unpublished manuscripts, at least that was his “pretext”.⁸ At Harvard University, where according to its website the status of a “special auditor” is not known, Derrida was in fact a “special student”, which, as a matter of fact, is nothing special. It means that he was a non-grad student, not enrolled for a degree. The consistent mentioning in all Derrida's anglophone biographies of his status as a “special auditor” at Harvard University in 1957 is, ironical as it may sound, most likely due to a transatlantic translation error. In French institutions of higher education, a “special student” is sometimes called an “auditeur”. The term derives from the Latin “audire”, which means “to listen”. “Auditeurs” are “special students” or students that are special in the sense that they have the authorisation to attend lectures at the university, in order to be able to listen to them, but not to pass exams on them. Implicitly, the term “auditeur” also says that it is undesirable that “special students” ask questions, because that would mean that they would not only listen, but also speak. The “auditeur” is not allowed to collect credits in order to obtain a degree, and therefore is not supposed to produce output of any kind. The “auditeur” is the student as the mere receptor, if not the receptacle, of “input”. “Ideally”, the “auditeur” does not even produce the zero degree of output which would be a question. In Boston, however, Derrida is not just an “auditeur”, he is a “special auditor”. He is an “auditor” who asks questions, if only to himself. The most urgent question for him at that time was how to write a doctoral

⁸ Geoffrey Bennington & Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida (1991) : 303 Paris, Seuil

thesis in philosophy. Through his reading of James Joyce and his study of Edmund Husserl in Massachusetts, the French “special auditor” Jacques Derrida tried to fix the theme, but also the form of the doctoral dissertation he planned to write once back home.

In France, a “special student” is also called an “étudiant libre”, which is what I was, when in 1988-1990 I studied in Paris at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, attending the courses of Jacques Derrida, while trying to fix the theme of the doctoral dissertation I wanted to write, which eventually would become a deconstructionist reading of the philosophy of another genius, who as a very young man would arrive in Cambridge, Massachusetts, only one year after Derrida left: Saul Kripke. In my doctoral thesis, Derrida and Kripke, who both share an albeit very different philosophical interest in proper names, would have the meeting they missed in the 1950s in Boston. Kripke, who as a student at Harvard taught a graduate course at MIT, would leave Cambridge with a Bachelor’s Degree in Mathematics, apparently never caring to obtain a Doctor’s Degree, but nevertheless becoming one of the United States’ most famous philosophy professors. Derrida on the contrary did care to obtain a Doctor’s Degree, but struggled tremendously with all the philosophical questions that came with the project of writing a doctoral dissertation. For Derrida, as a philosopher, it was inconceivable to write a philosophical thesis without ever asking the philosophical question “what is writing?”. For Derrida, the project of writing a doctor’s thesis led him to an impressive intellectual struggle with the question of writing. While Saul Aron Kripke became one of the most extravagant academics in our “publish or perish” times in that he published very little and did not even “write” his most famous book *Naming and Necessity*, which was based on transcripts by students and colleagues of partly improvised lectures, Jackie Elie Derrida in his own way equally resisted traditional academic standards and expectations concerning writing.⁹ Only in 1980, at age 50, ten days after the release of *The Empire Strikes Back*, Jacques Derrida obtained the so-called *Doctorat d’État*, a special type of doctorate, which until 1985 could be obtained in France, not on the basis of a conventional doctoral thesis, but on the basis of one’s.... “work”. Indeed, for his *doctorat d’état*, Derrida presented and defended – through a long oral examination by a jury – three books, which all deal in one way or another with the question of writing. In a sense, one can say that Derrida’s doctorate merely consisted of a philosophical portfolio, without an academic supplement. One of the main reasons for this was that Derrida simply could not accept that a traditional doctorate in philosophy was not supposed to reflect fundamental thinking on the question of writing in the way it was written.

Derrida’s philosophy of writing, as developed by him in the books constituting the portfolio he finally presented as his doctorate, is very helpful in order to discuss the sense or nonsense of the format of the doctorate in the arts. The idea that an artistic portfolio should be supplemented with a text in order to obtain a meaning which can be discussed intersubjectively misses the point of the artistic portfolio itself always being already text. This is a consequence of the famous Derridian dictum that says “il n’y a pas de hors-texte”, there is no outside to text. A firmly established and quite ridiculous misunderstanding of his philosophy that there is nothing but text is to say that Derrida would have claimed that there

⁹ Derrida beautifully described this struggle

in the presentation of his doctorate: *Jacques*

Derrida Ponctuations: le temps de la thèse

(1991) : 439-459 in *Id., Du droit à la philosophie,*

Paris, Galilée

is no outside world. During his life time, Derrida became so famous for ridiculous statements he had never made, that “Derrida” eventually also became the name of a hideous female Ketton spy who, according to the 1995 *Alliance Intelligence Reports*, a supplement to an edition of *Star Wars: The Role-Playing Game*, was an adversary of the Rebel Alliance to Restore the Republic, based on Space Station Kwenn. Well, at least this is what I found out on *wookieepedia*.

Derrida’s idea that there is nothing but text means that the outside world is itself text too. Not: text is everything, but everything is text. In an interview at the end of a book in which he discusses among others J.L. Austin’s and John Searle’s philosophy of language, Derrida said, angry at the way in which some American philosophers had been trying to ridicule his philosophy as an absurd form of scepticism: “I wanted to recall that the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to the semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call ‘text’ implies all the structures called ‘real’, ‘economic’, ‘historical’, ‘socio-institutional’, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that “there is nothing outside the text” ... It does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretive experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of differential referring.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida Limited Inc. (1988) : 148

Northwestern University Press

So a portfolio which is a selection of artworks is definitely always already text in itself. As a matter of fact, a portfolio will most likely be a presentation and/or a documentation of artworks, rather than the work itself, which means that it is, in its presentation or documentation, already differentially mediating and reflecting the artworks and that text in the narrow sense of the word is even already part of it. The artistic portfolio as a documenting and representing form already speaks of the work, rather than that it would be the work itself. At the same time it is also work done by the artist, an artistic work that represents and documents other artistic work by the artist. The portfolio itself has to be qualified as text, both in the expanded and in the narrow sense of the term.

Derrida’s expanded concept of “text” implies the need for an expanded notion of “reading”, as well as an expanded notion of “writing”.

As Derrida wrote in *Of Grammatology*: “And thus we say ‘writing’ for all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice: cinematography, choreography, of course, but also pictorial, musical, sculptural ‘writing’.”¹¹ Here, Derrida’s examples of writing are (still)

¹¹ Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*

(translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak)

(1976) : 9 Baltimore & London, Johns Hopkins

University Press

all artistic. Later, Derrida would expand the concept of writing even more, but the first and self-evident move in his expansion of the concept of writing was to include all art forms. Film, dance, music, painting, sculpture, all of them are in themselves forms of writing. Art is writing and is therefore an object to be read. Reading, however, is not just about decoding the meaning of signs. Reading has to come to terms with the fact that it will never be possible to determine once and for all the meaning of the world. The demand for a textual supplement to the artistic portfolio may be explained by fear for the constitutive abysmal character of meaning. But it also reveals a presentist philosophy of text, which since Derrida, has long been proven unsatisfactory. To ask for a textual supplement is obviously not going to save us from the problem of

interpretation. As if text would allow us to avoid the annoying possibility of interpretation. Instead of asking for an explanatory supplement, juries should confront themselves with their fear and have the courage to try to read what is already written. The argument that I hold against the textual supplement should not be understood as the idea that the artwork in itself is already full of meaning, but rather that there is no way to remedy with the abysmal structure of meaning inherent in the artwork itself. The demand for the supplement suggests that there might be a way to fill the gap. What is at work in this demand is one particular logic of “supplementality”, which one could define as the fiction that the open meaning of the art work can and should be revealed by a supplementary explanation.

However, one should stress the difference between the supplement to the artwork as an academic requirement for having the right explanation, on the one hand, and a certain aesthetics of the supplement which is inherent in the work of many artists, on the other hand, where the supplement is not seen as the explanation of the work, but rather as constitutive of the work itself. The artist’s supplement is not what gives us the solution, the answer, the right interpretation, but rather postpones the solution, the answer, the right interpretation even more. So “supplementality” can also be defined as an artistic strategy to escape the closure of interpretation, to leave all interpretations open, or to make interpretation an even more complex issue than it always already is.

In the actual state of the discussion on the format of the presentation of the results of artistic research in general and of the doctorate in the arts in particular, one may observe a tendency to appropriate the artist’s supplement thankfully, as if it were conforming to the spirit of the required academic supplement, while in fact its logic is quite the opposite. Of course, there are artworks that involve certain kinds of supplements and there are aspects of artworks that could be considered as supplements. One could argue, for instance, that the title of a painting is already a supplement to the painting. The question then becomes: at what point exactly does a supplement to an artwork, which may be considered by the artist as inherent to the artwork, become the kind of supplement that is considered a necessary requirement in order to present in an academic way the results of artistic research. What is annoying about this “academic” requirement of a textual supplement to the artwork – if it is to be considered a legitimate presentation of the results of artistic research – is that it does not take the artwork itself and all the writing that is involved in the production of the artwork itself, seriously. In other words, the academic requirement of a textual supplement to an artwork seriously lacks seriousness. In most cases, it seems more like a bureaucratic attempt at “keeping up appearances”.

Artistic research can involve many different things: avidly reading about a specific subject, randomly visiting exhibitions and confronting oneself with other artistic positions, trying out the visual, acoustic, or haptic impressions of different materials, or even ritually going to the flea market in search of nothing in particular, as Eran Schaerf once beautifully and convincingly described as one aspect of his practice of “artistic research”.¹² What all these different practices have in common, is the need of time: time to think, time to see, time to waste. As time is money, time is never given to anyone for free, and certainly not to the artist. As a consequence, everybody is under extreme pressure to explain why he or she needs so

¹² Eran Schaerf Unsubstantiated Investigation

in: Dieter Lesage & Kathrin Busch (eds.)

A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher.

The Academy and the Bologna Process,

AS#179 (2007) : 108-112 *Antwerp, MaHKA*

much time for such and such. Therefore, one cannot exclude that part of the actual discourse on artistic research is rhetoric used, needed or devised in order to convince funding authorities known to subscribe to the dogma of research and development that the artistic practice to be funded is in fact also research. If 3% of the GNP of European member states should be invested in research, then here is a brilliant opportunity for European member states to comply to their commitment: investment in artistic research.

In a few European countries, part of the research budget is now specifically allocated to artistic research. This is a great strike for each Academy in these countries, because it allows each one of them to become a major site of artistic production and to establish itself more self-consciously *within* the arts field, not on its doorstep. It was in this sense that, in my 2009 *e-flux essay* "The Academy is Back", I meant to say that the academy is back. The Academy is back as a credible partner in the arts world, as a site of artistic production, as a site of artistic research. As a theoretician, I am particularly delighted that the Academy proves to be a space where artists and theoreticians work on common artistic research projects. However, the comeback of the Academy, which one should admit is only at its beginnings, is already in a precarious state. The greatest vigilance will be necessary in order to prevent that the strike of the Academy does not turn out to be a Pyrrhus victory. As one knows, Pyrrhus of Epiros was the last Greek King who, among others at the Battle of Ascalum, succeeded in military victory against the upcoming Roman Empire, if only at great cost.

Considerable anti-Imperial rebellion will be needed in order for the Academy to stay with the light side of the Force. If we prefer to think of the Academy as part of the Rebellious Alliance to Restore the Republic, as George Lucas called the resistant multitudes against the Empire light years before the release of Negri and Hardt's *Empire*, then there is an urgent battle to be fought against a discourse which tends to slip into the Academy in the wake of the discourse on artistic research. Whereas I am convinced that the discourse on artistic research allows people working in Academies to reinvent the Academy as an autonomous site of production, we should refuse a supplementary rhetoric that presents itself as an inevitable corollary to the discourse on artistic research. As one knows, wherever the Academy gets funded for its artistic research, there is also talk about the need of a 'return on investment', of 'research output assessment', of 'matching funds', etc. An attempt is made to use the research mission of the Academy as a means to capitalistically discipline the Academy. It will not take long before professors at Academies will be expected to ground spin-off firms. Of course, this is where *Star Wars*, which in the beginning of my talk I have been hailing as an unlikely interesting product of artistic research, becomes a likely negative reference par excellence, with George Lucas as an emperor of merchandizing, licensing supplement after supplement after supplement, under the form of books, video games, television series, comics, etc. Of course, as with Darth Vader, once can still find something good in George Lucas, as the founder of Edutopia, or as the generous benefactor of the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts.

However, if one succumbs to the dark capitalist side of the Force as much as George Lucas did, one tends to see research exclusively under the angle of valorization. Against these dark tendencies, we should see

artistic research as a way of recognizing artistic labor time. The discourse on artistic research seems an adequate way to explain why artists need time, and thus money, in order to create. Artistic creation is not just about materials that one needs to buy or spaces one needs to rent, it is also about time needed to dedicate oneself to reflection, to study, to thinking. As a matter of fact, the notion of artistic research is quite subversive for a field that got used to paying high prices for artworks, completely independent from the amount of labor time involved in it. For me, the notion of artistic research is also about the recognition of the artist as a worker, as somebody who works so many hours, so many days, and who might want to get some money for all the things she or he does. For me, the notion of artistic research is not at all about an attempt to conform the arts to the sciences, to become more methodological, to become more discursive, or to become more technological. It is about the recognition of art as a form of cognitive labor and about a wage struggle for artists, who no longer accept that they work for an exhibition, that they get production money for works, but almost never get any fee for all the work they have done in order to prepare that exhibition. All the time, artists are told to invest in their work, to speculate on future value of their work. Artists are supposed to learn how to become their own shareholders. The discourse which presents artists as researchers should be an empowering discursive force, which values the artist as a worker and which contributes to the recognition of the need to pay artistic labor time. May that Force be with you.

Irit Rogoff

PRACTICING RESEARCH:

SINGULARISING KNOWLEDGE

For the presentation at “The Academy Strikes Back” conference I have been forwarded various questions by the organizers. These questions have mainly had to do with education and research within neo liberal cognitive capitalism and most specifically to me, about the relations between research and curating – but I have to confess that such questions are not really conducive for me as a way of entering into the problematics we are trying to address here today.

To some degrees these questions cannot be my entry point because I do not have great faith in the productivity of entering a discussion through a set of prescribed conditions which I might then need to negate, to lament and to resist. Of course we are all grappling with a set of conditions that affect both our institutional practices as well as the horizon limits of what we might want knowledge to be and how we might want it to operate. For myself I am less concerned with whether artistic research is a new paradigm or not, or with the bureaucratic protocols that are trying to domesticate it, but far more with the drive of those individuals and collectives, initiatives within institutions and stealth operations at its margins who seem determined to pursue it, no matter what strictures are set up for them. What does artistic research have to offer and if it does have something to offer, how can that possibility be protected rather than mainstreamed?

My reluctance is equally because I have in the past four years written so much about education, research and the curatorial that I am getting quite frustrated with the limits of what I have to say on the subject and therefore need to be something other than repeating. And in the meantime both the conditions of our work have shifted in the wake of both the financial downturn and the escalation of implementing the Bologna accord and equally my concerns and my thinking have shifted having become somewhat less interested in educational formats and more interested in modes of knowledge that inhabit these – and I want to use the occasion of this conference to begin understanding these shifts.

Recently, the annual lecture series known as the Reith Lectures, commemorating John Reith the founder of the broadcasting company, began on the BBC. This year the lecturer was Martin Reese the president of the Royal Society of Astronomy. He began by looking back to the 17th century emergence of aristocratic, self taught, scientific amateurs, who gathered out of passionate curiosity about the natural world – formed societies, exchanged books, reviewed each others experiments and theorems, and formed the first professional, learned associations devoted to uncovering radical new knowledge such as the Royal Society in 1660 – when a dozen men gathered to hear the young Christopher Wren give a lecture on astronomy. In the discussion that followed, they decided to



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form a society for the study of the new and still controversial “Experimental Philosophy”. The motto they decided on for their new association was “take nothing on authority”, a motto that still resonates with me today as I try and think about academic protocols and the academic authority of “truth regimes” and how these are constantly challenged by creative practices of knowledge.

Later that same day a rather brilliant, practice-based researcher at Goldsmiths underwent what we call the “upgrade”, which is the passage from the preliminary to the final phase of the PhD. On this occasion three professors sat in a room trying to convince this brilliant young man that he could do whatever he wanted, since he was clearly both serious in his research and passionate about his subject. We went on saying he could invent a narrative, de-contextualize his objects, speak in any kind of voice, and in general take as many liberties with his work as served his purpose. He, on the other hand, clung to the conventional academic protocols like a drowning man to a raft – his concerns were with how could he prove this, and how could he ground that, and what did he need to do to be taken seriously by a professional/academic community that held him up he felt to higher standards of knowledge. There was something both comic and confusing about our trying to liberate him from scholasticism and from his belief that it was some mysterious realm that he needed to crack in order to enter formal bastions of knowledge, and in his refusal of our emancipatory rhetoric.

The first story, of the Royal Society in the 17th century, refers to knowledge pre signification, and the second story, of the anxious researcher, refers to knowledge trying to be liberated from over signification and somewhere between these two is the dilemma I am trying to get at. Now I am neither naïve not romantic, I do not hark back nostalgically to the 17th century; to privileged amateur men sustained by colonial adventures, indentured laborers, vast estates, and arrogant entitlement – but I do want to keep a hold of two of their formulations; the value of “experimental philosophy” and the edict to “take nothing on authority”. And I think that “practice-based research” or as I prefer to think of it “creative practices of knowledge” are some of the ways in which we might grasp these and ensure that they do not cede to the endless pragmatic demands of knowledge protocols: outcomes, outputs, impact, constant monitoring of the exact usefulness of a particular knowledge or of its ability to follow the demands and the imperatives of cognitive capitalism – demands to be portable, to be transferable, to be useful, to be flexible, to be applied, to be entrepreneurial and generally integrated within market economies at every level.

But my question is whether constantly dealing critically with the structures and with the protocols and with their concomitant demands is actually going to get us to where we might need to be? Because my concern is with the actual knowledge and my belief is in its potential power for change.

I should say that I come from an institution that has had some fifteen years of post-graduate degrees in practice-based research work – and not only in the arts but also in anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, media and communications, visual culture, and many others. In addition, I have recently began the work of establishing a national association called “Forum – Creative Practices of Knowledge” to ensure that this work has advocacy at the level of funding and assessment; that this is done on terms that we



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value and that ensure that the work is not held up to prescriptive models. Over these past years, with about forty practice-based PhD students currently in three programs in my department and with another 200 or so across our university – we have been adamant in refusing a uniform model for practice-based research and on insisting that each project needs to develop its own methodology and its own structure. This does not mean to claim that substantively we are more advanced, experienced or know better than elsewhere that is grappling with such questions. It does certainly mean that we have created far more work for ourselves by refusing such prescriptive uniformity, as each project needs to be excavated in detail until its subject and its methodology emerge organically from its concerns and its position. On the other hand we are working within a situation in which UK IHES have vigorously marketed this experience of practice-based research as a market advantage for overseas recruitment of students – but regardless of its instrumentalisation by various dominant market strategies, it does provide an effective model for a resistance (one of the few instances) to a normative mainstreaming of academic research at the level of knowledge. Issues of a-signification, of not adhering to a single level of meaning, and of singularisation of the new relational mode of both subjects and of knowledges are central to such a resistance.

Important as these institutional issues are, it seems to me that one of the limitations of the critical discussion we are having at present is that if we focus the discussion on the strictures and bureaucratic limits being imposed, we do not actually talk about knowledge. Equally, if we pose the question through the so called “educational turn” in curating, we are talking about protocols and we do not actually talk about the knowledge that is either circulating or informing or being put on display within these enterprises. When we focus on new formats such as gatherings and conversations and open access sites of learning and teaching as modes of artistic activity that supplant the putting of objects on display, we recognize that market forces are as much countered by discursive practices across our field as the art world capitalizing on some of its flexibilities and the ability to turn its infrastructures. And so the art world became the site of extensive talking – talking emerged as a practice, as a mode of gathering, as a way of getting access to some knowledge and to some questions, as networking and organizing, and articulating some necessary questions. But did we put any value on what was actually being said? Or, did we privilege the coming-together of people in space and trust that formats and substances would somehow osmotically emerge from these?

Instead of fighting for alternatives I want at this moment to pose questions about the circuits of knowledge that went from amateur to professional, from general to discipline based, and to currently understanding themselves, at a progressive level at least, as being “undisciplined”. Obviously the vast body of thought that Michel Foucault put in to play with his historical analysis of knowledge formations and the assumptions they have been based on has been a key here.¹ But we have also been through a decade in which activist initiatives at countering institutional dominance of knowledge production and dissemination have shifted the ground in terms of expanding the range of the possible formats available for learning. In this instance, I want to pay as much attention to the *knowledges themselves*, as we do to the *demands put on them*: the structures that house them, the strictures that police them, and the rhetorics that



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¹ Primarily in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *The Order of Things* (1966) and the later collection *Language, Counter Memory, Practice* (1980) *Cornell U.P.*

they are embedded in. In a series of papers published over the past two years, my increasing focus, I now realize, has been the move from the formats to the substances of knowledge. There is an argument forming here, I think, that we should not be arguing formats with counter formats, structures with counter structures, protocols with counter protocols – but rather with emergent knowledge formations that have the ability to undo the ground on which they stand.

To advocate for creative practices of knowledge is to advocate for its undisciplining. It is to argue that it needs to be viewed as an a-signifying practice that produces ruptures and affects within the map of knowledge. This is difficult since the legacy of knowledge we have inherited from the Enlightenment has viewed knowledge as teleological, linear, cumulative, consequent, and verifiable either through experimentation or through orders of logic and sequential argumentation.

It is slippery to try and talk about knowledge itself, slippery to avoid essentialism or notions of autonomy and equally awkward to avoid the heroics that attach themselves to the declaration of “the new”. In this context, Foucault’s “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” comes to mind. But not necessarily as I think he meant it in terms of repressed knowledges that come from less normative or less hegemonic positions of class, sexuality or epistemology. Instead perhaps a contemporary notion of such an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” has to do with their pursuit of “unfitting” bodies of knowledge from their accepted frames, leaving their place within the chain of argumentation and drawing to themselves unexpected companions; company whose attachment and proximity can provide paradigmatic challenge rather than arguing and supplying affirmation.

A-SIGNIFICATION AND SINGULARISATION This is the process by which knowledge becomes A-signifying knowledge. As Simon O’Sullivan has argued “For Deleuze and Guattari, an a-signifying rupture is a process by which the rhizome resists territorialization, or attempts to signify, or name it by an overcoding power. It is the process by which the rhizome breaks out of its boundaries (deterritorializes) and then reassembles or re-collects itself elsewhere and else-when (reterritorializes), often assuming a new or shifted identity. In the classroom, a-signifying ruptures are those processes students employ to avoid being just students, that classrooms use to avoid being just classrooms, that content uses to avoid being just subject matters, and that teachers use to avoid being just teachers. A-signifying ruptures are those various processes by which rhizomes proliferate, wallow, accrete, spread, shatter and reform, disrupt into play, seeming chaos, or anarchy”.² So the process by which knowledge assumes a-significatory forms is one that destabilizes its relation to other fixed knowledges and acquires an affective surplus.

Elsewhere recently I have argued that education needs to engage with the notion of “Free”, in the context of a special issue of *e-flux journal* entitled “Education Actualized”.³ Obviously it is not the romance of liberation that I have in mind here in relation to “free”. The kind of knowledge that interested me in this proposal to the university was one that was not framed by disciplinary and thematic orders, a knowledge that would instead be presented in relation to an urgent issue, and not an issue as defined by knowledge conventions, but by the pressures and

² Simon O’Sullivan *Academy: The Production of Subjectivity*, in: *Academy* (2006) : 238-44, ed. Irit Rogoff, Angelika Nollert et al, Frankfurt:

Revolver

³ www.e-flux.com/journal/view/127

struggles of contemporaneity. When knowledge is unframed it is less grounded genealogically and can navigate forwards rather than backwards. This kind of “unframed” knowledge obviously had a great deal to do with what I had acquired during my experiences in the art world, largely a set of permissions with regard to knowledge and a recognition of its performative faculties – that knowledge *does* rather than *is*. But the permissions I encountered in the art world came with their own set of limitations, a tendency to reduce the complex operations of speculation to either illustration or to a genre that would visually exemplify “study” or “research”. Could there be, I wondered, another mode in which knowledge might be set free without having to perform such generic mannerisms, without becoming an aesthetic trope in the hands of curators hungry for the latest “turn”?

Knowledge cannot be “liberated” as it is endlessly embedded in long lines of transformation which link in inexplicable ways to produce new conjunctions. Nor do I have in mind the romance of “avant garde” knowledge with its oppositional modes of “innovation” as departure and breach. Nor am I particularly interested in what has been termed “interdisciplinarity” with its intimation of movement between disciplines and which *de facto* leaves in tact those membranes of division and logics of separation and containment, through illusions of *sharing*. Finally, and I say this with some qualification, neither is my main issue here to undo the disciplinary and professional categories that have divided and isolated bodies of knowledge from one another with the aim of having a heterogeneous field populated by “bodies” of knowledge akin to the marketing strategies that ensure choice and multiplicity and dignify the practices of epistemological segregation by producing endless new sub-categories for inherited bodies of named and contained knowledge.

There is a vexed relation between freedom, individuality, and sovereignty that has a particular relevance for the arena being discussed here, as knowledge and education have a foot hold both in processes of individuation and in processes of socialization. Hannah Arendt expressed this succinctly when she warned that “Politically, this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will. For it leads either to a denial of human freedom – namely as it realized that whatever men may be, they are never sovereign – or to the insight that the freedom of one man, or a group, or a body politic can only be purchased at the price of the freedom i.e. the sovereignty, of all others. Within the conceptual framework of traditional philosophy, it is indeed very difficult to understand how freedom and non-sovereignty can exist together or, put it another way, how freedom could have been given to men under conditions of non-sovereignty.”⁴

And in the final analysis it is my interest to get around both concepts, freedom and sovereignty, through the operations of “singularisation”. Perhaps it is knowledge de-individuated, de-radicalized in the conventional sense of the radical as breach and yet operating within the circuits of singularity – of “the new relational mode of the subject”, which is preoccupying me in this instance.

And so, the task to hand seems to me to be *not one of liberation from confinement*, but rather one of undoing the very possibilities of *containment*. While an unbounded circulation of capital, goods, information, hegemonic

⁴ Hannah Arendt What is Freedom? Chapter VI

'Revolution and Preservation in The Portable'

Hannah Arendt (ed. Peter Baehr) (2000) : 455

London: Penguin

alliances, populist fears, newly globalized uniform standards of excellence etc. are some of the hallmarks of a late neo-liberal phase of capitalism – nevertheless we cannot simply equate every form of the unbounded and judge them all as equally insidious. “Free” in relation to knowledge it seems to me, has its power in a centripetal movement outwards that is not a process of penetrating and colonizing everywhere and everything in the relentless mode of capital, but in reaching unexpected entities and then drawing them back, mapping them onto the field of perception.

While knowledge in the process of a-signification produces a spatial and located detachment from its moorings, knowledge in the process of singularisation is relational but not necessarily aligned. As Suley Rolnik argues “processes of singularisation – a way of rejecting all these modes of pre-established encoding, all these modes of manipulation and remote control rejecting them in order to construct modes of sensibility, modes of relation with the other, modes of production, modes of creativity that produce a singular subjectivity.”⁵

Viewing notions of singularity “the new relational mode of the subject” and of processes of singularisation as modes of coming together and producing relations and agendas that do not emanate from shared identities, shared ideologies, shared belief systems (or as Giorgio Agamben says so succinctly “*of Being Red, Being French, Being Muslim*”) – seems acutely relevant as much for knowledge as it is for political agency. Here knowledge would exist in a relation but not one of telos; its framing would be its urgency in the world and not its epistemological legacy, and it would have the ability to form new and unexpected alliances in numerous directions or in other words to undergo processes of “singularisation”.

So the potential is that practice-based research might singularize knowledge rather than be neatly placed within its structures. That materials, associations, narratives, methodologies would pursue one another in unconventional modes, invite each other to dance as it were – art history and astro physics for example might develop some conversation, not just as bodies of knowledge but as the narrative structures they are recounted in, as drives, impulses, personal histories, modes of curiosity, conceits of intelligence, etc. Practice-based research, then, is a permission for knowledge that is tangential and contingent and whose sociability as it were, its search for companionship, is based not on linearity and centrality but on dispersal and on consistent efforts at re-singularisation.

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⁵ *Suley Rolnik* *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*

Semiotexte (2008) : 51

Tim Stott

RESEARCH REPORT:

CRITIQUE OF ARCHIVAL REASON

AND WHAT IF WE TOO SEE NOTHING? THOUGHTS TOWARDS A GENERIC ARCHIVE The aim here is to report on the exhibition *Critique of Archival Reason*, held at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (2010) and to pursue two lines of enquiry that follow from this. Firstly, I shall take the exhibition very much at its word, asking how the works in the exhibition in their different ways understood archival reason and made it an object of critique. Secondly, it will be a question of how certain techniques of display correlated, productively or otherwise, with the research practices of the artists included, as the exhibition exemplified some of the persistent and crucial difficulties encountered in this correlation.

I want to begin from these lines of enquiry, in order then to end up somewhere else. To do this I shall pursue something of a phantasm – and of course, research and enquiry is always in pursuit of one phantasm or another, which implicates itself into our methods and our desires.¹

My phantasm is that of a generic archive, that is to say, an archive consisting of generic objects or artefacts, which would be subtracted from any particular membership or constituency, thereby offering perhaps a quite different understanding of the commonality an archive holds together.

I do not claim this phantasm as mine alone. Borrowing from Walid Raad and Jalal Toufic, it emerges from the opening sequence of Alain Resnais' 1959 film *Hiroshima mon amour*, where a Japanese man repeats to his French lover, despite her protestations and the testimonies she gives to the contrary, that she has seen nothing of Hiroshima. Nothing is witnessed of an event that appears to offer countless indexes of its taking place. In time, however, it becomes clear that the Japanese man too has seen nothing, so that the witnessing of nothing is what they share and hold in common, and in fact might be what allows them to love.

Just how such subtraction and sharing might be relevant to us will become clearer in due course; and as it does so, I hope it will reframe some of the questions that we might ask of the Dublin exhibition, along with our understanding of the questions that the exhibition itself might ask us.

First of all, then, what is the archival reason that is to be subjected to critique? Is it (1) the techniques of categorization, of counting and accounting that seek through the archive to keep watch over the boundaries of inclusion and legitimacy, of same and other? The keen observation of sameness and difference certainly appears to be the object of Irene Kopelman's enquiry, which she demonstrates by mimicking techniques of cataloguing, but without purpose. The object of her observation is a random selection of stones from the bottom of a fish tank, which are then catalogued and displayed in folios according to size. Where the archive begins and what it delimits are trivial and arbitrary, then, relative to the practices of archiving, of collecting, selecting and cataloguing.

¹ Roland Barthes *Comment vivre ensemble:*

cours et séminaires au Collège de France

(1976-1977) (2002) : 34 *Paris, Seuil*



01 / 02 ARCHIVAL REASON: RHA: Irene Kopelman, Jeremiah Day

This arbitrariness demonstrates that there is no necessary correspondence between our systems of categorization and the stuff of the world, and so the world could always be ordered, and, therefore, be known and represented, otherwise.

Or (2), is the object of critique more specifically epistemological, concerned with the conditions of possibility of statements that can be made about the world and the reasoning that can be done given these conditions? With this reasoning, all that cannot be thought falls away, beyond the purview of the archive of our epoch. To follow Foucault: as “that which, outside ourselves, delimits us,” the archive is an epistemological horizon at once both close to us and indescribable in the here and now. Its description requires distance, historical, cultural, critical or otherwise.² We come across fragments of this horizon in Sean Snyder’s *Archive* which re-edits footage of an exhibition of Mexican art in Kiev in 1966, featuring tours of the museum and discussions among the audience as to its significance, their expectations, and so on. Here we face the strangeness, even the absurdity of the questions that could be asked of art at a historical moment that is not our own – that is neither our present moment nor, for many of us now, part of the memory of that moment. How many of us, after all, would currently hold that the primary criterion for the evaluation of art is its “truthfulness”? Snyder’s work (rather sardonically, perhaps) addresses the prejudices of the conversations that we ourselves might have before it – their ambitions, their certainties, their attempts at openness – if only by indicating the amount of hermeneutic work required for us now to establish a common locus where these two horizons would meet.

Or (3), is it a question of the hierarchical distribution of hermeneutic rights and competences that allow access to the archive and protect it from illegitimate statements, dirty hands and untrained eyes? One might then ask just what the mode of address was of the works in the Dublin exhibition. How did they present themselves to be interpreted? How did they distribute roles throughout a hermeneutic situation?

One of the core aims of the Dublin exhibition might have been to critique the use of standard archival forms as the privileged mode of presentation for research-based practices, yet for the most part it followed another, equally familiar format, that of the group show: a display of discrete, authored objects, more or less consistent in scale and extension, each of which makes a particular address to a viewing and reading subject within a gallery environment and does not necessarily redistribute hermeneutic rights and competences to an archive any more than the use of the more text-and-interface-dominated archival formats that it seeks to critique.

There is a broader problematic here, How might it be possible for a work, without having recourse to standard archival forms, to reintegrate a mnemonic value into its display, now that this value has been displaced from the displayed object or artefact to online archives, catalogues, interpretive centers or “contextualising infolabs” as Henk Slager describes them?³ A result of this displacement might be that design and display are placed primarily in the service of exhibition value and its correlate exchange value, now rendered almost autonomous.⁴ What kind of memory structure is it possible for a work to elaborate, and indeed, to what extent is such a structure possible, without submitting memory again to the primacy of exhibition value?

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² Michel Foucault *L'archéologie du savoir*

(1969) : 179 Paris, Gallimard



02 / 02 RHA: Sean Snyder, Shoji Kato, Cecilia Gronberg

³ Henk Slager press release for *Critique of Archival Reason*

⁴ Hal Foster *Archives of Modern Art in Design and Crime: and other diatribes* (2002)

London: Verso

RESEARCH REPORT:
CRITIQUE OF ARCHIVAL REASON

Or finally (4), is archival reason primarily the exclusive methods of historiographical institutions; the seemingly inevitable, if not always deliberate, forgetting of so many memories and testimonies from the records of history? If this is the case, then the task would be to restore to the present what has been forgotten, to re-narrate histories, and in doing so to show the past as heterogeneous, its description always incomplete and its continuities arrived at by force. But then more than an exposition of knowledge, perhaps also to engage in what Hal Foster describes as a “passionate pedagogy” – to work on the horizons of love and desire as much as to distribute information, because in forgetting certain histories one also forgets certain desires, just as one can rarely recount these histories without passion.⁵

This is a key motivation of Jeremiah Day’s work. His performances and historical narratives are not so much restorative, however, seeking to return to wholeness fragmented, near-forgotten memories, but rather, comparable to Benjamin’s famous formulation in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, they “seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”⁶ Day’s narrative performances present a parade (or constellation) of such flashes of memory, and of a body in search of adequation between its repertoire of gestures and the wreckage of dispersed and discontinuous images.

It is significant in this regard that Day and Snyder each describe their practice as didactic, recognizing perhaps that a practice that struggles with conformism in the representation of the past must deal with pedagogical methods of some sort, and that these methods must again involve more than disclosure of information. For example, when performing the *Tarlabashi Crawl* (2009), Day recounts an anxiety or at least a difficulty concerning the representation of poverty in Istanbul, witnessed whilst sharing a residency with Can Altay at Platform Garanti. He tells of his unwillingness to simply report this poverty, as this would be too open to misrepresentation and might give the false impression that something productive was being done. Again, we encounter the problem of hermeneutic rights and competences, here concerning the vast archiving and historiographical operations of the media in which forgotten stories and documents are, more often than not, like Poe’s famous purloined letter, hidden in plain view.

So what is the model of critique operating in the above examples of archival reason? In a 1981 interview, Foucault speaks succinctly of critique as uncovering thought in silent habits and trying to change that thought.⁷ Elsewhere he writes that critique is to make things difficult where they are otherwise all too easy, or it is to make a problem once again of those practices which, although initially developed in order to handle certain problems, have now settled into an ontological domain, becoming simply *what is* – what are the problematisations through which this domain is given to thought, and what are the practices that form them?⁸ Are we to understand a research-based arts practice as broadly consistent with this critical attitude or ethos, this critique of what we are, conducted by way of the historical analysis of our limits and experimentation with how to go beyond them?⁹

If this is the case, if such is indeed the ethos of research-based practice, then in the critique of what we are at present, we might pause to consider just how a discourse of critique itself functions as legitimation of the

⁵ Hal Foster *An Archival Impulse*, October 110 (Fall 2004) : 6, I am indebted to Edia Connole for making the connection between Foster’s description of Hirschhorn and the story-telling of Day.

⁶ Walter Benjamin *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations*, translated by H. Zorn (1999) : 247 London: Pimlico

⁷ “There is always a little thought even in the most stupid institutions. There is always thought even in silent habits.” Michel Foucault *Est-il donc important de penser?* (1981) interview with Didier Eribon, republished in Defert, D. and Ewald, F. eds. *Dits et écrits*: volume IV, 1980-1988, (1994) : 180 Paris: Gallimard

⁸ Michel Foucault *Histoire de la sexualité II: l’usage des plaisirs* (1984) : 19 Paris Gallimard

⁹ Michel Foucault *What is Enlightenment?* (1984), in Rabinow, P. ed., *Michel Foucault: Essential Works 1954-1984*, volume 1: Ethics (2000) : 319 London Penguin

archival reasoning of contemporary art. In other words, critique appears already as an archival fact, the interpretation and categorisation of its statements have already begun, even as it seeks to move along the limits of the archive of what we are. It is an archival fact that has a special currency throughout the discourse of contemporary arts practice.

Taking heed of the *worldliness* of such a critical attitude, to borrow Said's term, complicates just what we might expect of critical arts research and the works by means of which it is disclosed as they contribute to a critical discourse and discourse of criticality.¹⁰ One might ask also just how often a research-based practice encounters its discursive limits by way of the questions it asks of its methods and the methods it appropriates in the course of its enquiries.

Consider the following rather arch statement from Sean Snyder.

In the art world, people don't entirely know what they are talking about. They ask a lot of questions ... It is in fact those who ask questions who make the entire mechanism function.

He goes on:

*The single most interesting discussion I have had about art was not with an artist, curator, critic, or the like, but with an El Al security officer a few years ago when I was detained and subsequently escorted onto a flight to Tel Aviv.*¹¹

Just how can our research be a critical enquiry into our limits if critique or critical questioning itself is one of the key functions by which our discourse reproduces itself, organizing its fields of knowledge and domains of legitimacy? Seeking a response to this tricky question will lead us to the particular significance of the phantasm introduced earlier.

A key negative characterization of archival reason is that it tends towards homogenization, that it forcibly schematises the stuff of the world, privileges equivalence or consistency over difference, and in doing so overlooks singularities and reduces complexity. Conceived thus, the archive seems to consist primarily of a policing of borders. It follows that where there is police there should be critique. As we know, arts practices have engaged with this archival policing for some time in order to interfere with it, appropriate and divert its taxonomies, reconfigure its materials, and generally demonstrate the contingency of those differences that make a difference, thereby counter-ing homogenizing reason with the disclosure of heterogeneity.

But what if archival reason is already heterogeneous? What if it is not at all uniform and based upon equivalence but is, rather, multiple and complex?

And what if the archive, "that which, outside ourselves, delimits us", consists of the rules of a practice, a *practice* of differentiation that, insofar as it is our own, cannot be described in total and yet cannot be avoided?¹²

If this is the case, then it would seem that the claim for heterogeneity is fully consistent with this rule of practice, that it demands the expression of further particularities and further differentiations to be added in an expansion of our epistemological and categorical horizons, because there are always more forms available for recombination, always more ways to connect what cannot be connected.

Here, we might argue instead for subtraction. Perhaps it is by subtraction that we might encounter the limit of our present archival reason.

A practice of subtraction rather than differentiation would, paradoxically enough, add nothing to the archive. It would present us with the opportunity to see nothing.¹³

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CRITIQUE OF ARCHIVAL REASON

¹⁰ Edward Said *Secular Criticism*, in

The World, the Text and the Critic (1983)

Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press

¹¹ Sean Snyder *Disobedience in Byelorussia:*

Self-interrogation on 'Research-Based Art'

(2009) : 1 *e-flux journal* 5

¹² Michel Foucault *L'archéologie* : 176

¹³ This is not a call for 'an aesthetic of wilfully muted or voluntarily silenced objects,' as

Buchloch has described a key tendency of art of

the past couple of decades. See *Benjamin H.D.*

Buchloch Refuse and Refuge in Gabriel Orozco,

edited by Yves-Alain Bois (2009) : Cambridge,

Mass, MIT Press

To return to the scene from *Hiroshima mon amour* in which the Japanese lover repeats “You have seen nothing of Hiroshima”; that there is nothing to be seen of this disaster is, for Jalal Toufic, a result of its having been surpassed by a further disaster – the withdrawal of the cultural materials of a tradition prior to it. With regard to such a situation Toufic claims that “art acts like the mirror in vampire films: it reveals the withdrawal of what we think is still there.”¹⁴

Of course, Raad and Toufic are concerned with the loss of Lebanese/ Near-Eastern cultural traditions, but I wonder if we cannot observe the archival limits of our own moment as littered with minor disasters, just as Benjamin’s angel of history looked upon the wreckage at its feet. Such disasters do not mean that one cannot record, catalogue, and construct an archive, but the prior tradition is no longer available except in the form of a counterfeit or simulacrum.

Witnessing the withdrawal of what appears to be extant and available has a peculiar power. When the Japanese lover repeats “You have seen nothing in Hiroshima” it could mean, on the one hand, that without direct experience of events, the French woman cannot share in the experience of those who were present. On the other hand, it might mean that she is included in the community of those who have witnessed *nothing*, i.e. those who have experienced, following the surpassing disaster, the withdrawal of what appears to be still available in the hospitals, museums, reconstructions, newsreels, scars, and various other indexes or documents of what happened in Hiroshima, which the woman lists as evidence of her witnessing when she replies: “I have seen everything at Hiroshima. Everything.” This community of those who have seen nothing includes her Japanese lover, who also was not present. This sharing of nothing offers them an equality without predicate, the condition of their love.

In the Dublin exhibition, there are two works that can be approached by way of this subtraction and this sharing of nothing. The first is Jeremiah Day’s *Fred Hampton’s Apartment*, especially the photograph of a banner showing the cover of Richard G. Stern’s *The Books in Fred Hampton’s Apartment*. Fred Hampton was Deputy Chamber of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panthers, and died in his bed in 1969, assassinated by the Chicago Police Department at the behest of the F.B.I. The contents of Stern’s book are not available; they constitute a gap in the archive.

So, instead of asking how these books can be made present again, Day seems to have asked himself how he might exhibit something that is not available or how he might show that there is nothing to see.

The first way in which to understand subtraction, then, is as a display of the withdrawal of what we otherwise believe to be available or what we believe could be made available as a result of appropriate research.

The second way of understanding subtraction immanent to archival reason is as the display of the real of the archive. One finds this with Snyder’s *Index*: an archive of nothing in particular, but here the nothing to be seen is not so much a gap as the substrata of the archive’s apparatuses of recording and registration, from which any particularity of reference has been subtracted.

It would be too much to suggest that either way might yet provide the conditions of love, but there is at least the offer to share in a subtraction at the limits of what delimits us.

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¹⁴ *Jalal Toufic* The Withdrawal of Tradition

Past a Surpassing Disaster (2009) : 57

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