

“Art Knowledge” at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

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Since the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna has attained university status in 1998 an investigation that I have called “experimentum” has started to investigate methods of artistic and theoretical research in this particular context. The development towards this new type of research has unquestionably also been induced by an increase in pressure from educational and institutional politics to take a stance. Because of that we have to be careful that the art university is not to be understood as a reproduction machine, but instead as a place where art can be created under other conditions, i.e. in an atmosphere open to different outcomes and not primarily geared toward utilization.

For this reason, we have taken the bull by the horns and made artistic research in a university context itself the object of study. New postgraduate art programmes and a “PhD in practice” programme designed accordingly are currently being developed, closely linked to the emergence of knowledge-based societies.

In order to be able to exist within this current structure, art universities are faced with the task of positioning themselves roughly according to the parameters of academic structures. An obvious risk here is that art universities are on the brink of being functionalized by various economic, cultural and educational fields of interest. At this juncture, it is imperative to withstand the pressure of academic normalization and functionalization and to take position.

Moreover it is necessary to dispel prejudice and to clear mutual resentments on both sides.

- What does research mean in the sciences and arts?
- What commonalities do science and art share?
- At what points do science and art intersect?
- How can the specific qualities of each field be defined?
- And how can science and art mutually benefit from one another?

Both science and the arts engage similar questions and experimental designs in their processes of methodically searching for new knowledge.

The design here is basically: to formulate the problem and situate it in a particular context, followed by an artistic/scientific investigation, which, in the best-case scenario, would result in material or immaterial findings, on the basis of which the “researcher” positions her/himself in relation to the original question and context.

It is important to mention here that research in the natural and technological sciences has largely been misinterpreted, as their history is commonly described as based on the

reconstruction of a logical sequence of individual steps representing a linear strand of research correlations. It is necessary to include here that rationalizations in the new sciences, (perhaps even since Einstein and Heisenberg), have been based on intuition, chance, chaos etc.; however, the predominant image of science is still rigidly founded on objectivity claims. The postulated linearity here is an illusion though and, at best, a construct providing a framework within which the unpredictable can be traced and framed, as intuition and a certain amount of chance are integral to this research process. In the worst-case scenario, the prescribed system is simply a measurement/constraint that provides the sciences with disciplined hierarchies.

In taking a look at the developments in scientific fields such as cybernetics or the philosophy of science since the 1990s, it becomes apparent that transdisciplinary modes of knowledge production, which take place in very heterogeneous contexts, have reached a point when it has become necessary to establish new criteria for assessment and quality assurance. It may seem that some scientific disciplines and their understanding of research have come to strongly resemble artistic modes of thinking and vice versa.

In many areas artistic research can be defined as a methodological investigation of artistic practice or as praxis-generated research situated within contemporary culture. Artistic research operates in a methodic manner, is problem-oriented and eclectic. It has its own grammar that is derived from its own interferences and spaces for negotiation, which are constantly being re-constituted through praxis.

The Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna perceives itself as an optimal space for negotiating theoretical and practical research, teaching and praxis. Specific characteristics of the field of study Art Theory and Cultural Studies, which was established at the Academy some years ago, are the interweaving of theory and artistic practice in teaching concepts as well as interdisciplinary and inter-faculty project work.

The results are to be understood as a space for negotiation, a space in which action-reaction are fundamental modes of working and where openness and indeterminacy are not seen as flaws of the system, but as advantages. A prerequisite is definitely that knowledge production processes remain open to scrutiny and accessible to the respective artistic and scientific communities. This process is likened to an “experimentum” because the status ascribed to such practices at art universities is that of a cultural phenomenon, as they actively contribute to making artistic knowledge and research part of cultural and scientific discourse, which, based on experience, can also be perceived on an aesthetic level.

The research programme “Epistemological and Methodological Foundations of Art Production” - Art-Knowledge for short, started this year at the academy, takes this discussion as a point of departure and puts it into practice. Thus it provides an innovative context for a postgraduate programme that is able to offer doctoral candidates an environment that affords them with proper supervision and thematic focus interwoven with the feedback and support of a high level of competence in philosophy, art theory, artistic practice, cultural theory and natural sciences.

The programme of the PhD in practice is based on the mediation and transfer of scientific and artistic methods and research practices, which the student is to develop through project work

and based on appropriating existing models. The study programme is closely oriented along the lines of the research interests at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, while simultaneously to broaden them.

Within the framework of our doctoral programme, this process will not only be studied but actively further developed as well. The intensive interlinking of artistic and scientific forms of reflection and production will provide the doctoral programme candidates with the skills necessary for them to engage in independent research within an emerging transdisciplinary field. The emphasis has been placed on transdisciplinarity not only because it is crucial to the idea of foundationally transforming the relationship between art and science, but also because of the principal international nature of this doctoral study programme.

The Academy's postgraduate studies programme aiming for the doctoral qualification in fine arts starts in October 2009.