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Artistic Research as Boundary Work



The quality of the research is determined by an extended peer group in which stakeholders from the context of application also have a voice. I say “also” because the basis on which research is judged, as well as the final word over that judgment, still resides in the academic community of peers.

Intermezzo 1: On peer review

The peer review system may be regarded as a sign of the independence and maturity of the domain of science. Within that domain, the forum of peers is the first to decide what is relevant and what the quality standards will be. Mutual peer assessment of quality and validity is also required in the case of newer forms of knowledge production, preferably in an open and blind assessment process in accepted academic channels.

So how, then, is the relevance and the quality of art and artistic research assessed? When asked which people judge the quality of artistic research, the head of a prestigious postgraduate art institute in the Netherlands recently replied “artists and experts.” By “experts” he meant curators, critics, theoreticians...

It is true that what art is is not determined by artists alone, but is “defined” in the “art world” (to follow Danto and Howard Becker), in the “field of cultural production” (to follow Pierre Bourdieu), in the “network of actors” (to follow Bruno Latour). Yet the question remains: who are the experts? Who are the peers? Wouldn't it attest to the maturity of artistic research if the dominant influence of curators and other “secondary” actors were to come to an end? Or, more cautiously perhaps, shouldn't the artist-researchers themselves accede to the forum of peers that determines what has relevance and quality? Fortunately, we now see the phenomenon of the artist-curator popping up here and there. Emphasizing the importance of the artist-researcher as part of the community of peers would greatly benefit the emerging field of artistic research.

The idea of art as an autonomous sphere (and the story of its eighteenth-century emancipation)

The following tale may be told of the relationship between art and the domains of science and morality. Once upon a time, in Greek antiquity, thinkers like Plato emphasized the unity of beauty, truth, and goodness. But over the course of history, the life spheres of art, science, and morality grew apart, until, in the eighteenth century, they became not only institutionally, but also theoretically, autonomous. This differentiation between aesthetics, epistemology, and ethics — which Kant provided with an impressive foundation in his Critiques — still persists today, although “the unity of reason in the diversity of its voices”⁴ was also emphasized from Kant onwards.

Henk Borgdorff

The difference between art and artistic research

Asking how artistic research differs from art is a corollary of a broader question: How does the domain of art differ from the domain of science? Or where does art stand in relation to science, or to politics and morality, to the economy or to everyday life?

How art relates to science may seem obvious at first glance. Just as there is an obvious difference between playing sports and studying them in sport sciences, or between politics and political science, the distinction between art practice and artistic research would seem as clear as day. Yet drawing boundaries like these is not always easy. Consider the domain of the courts as compared to the legal sciences, or that of religion in comparison to theology. And the recent financial crisis has made us painfully aware that the distinction between the economy and economics is highly relative.

Das ist eben die große Frage:
Wo steht die Kunst?
Welchen Ort hat sie?

The attempt to distinguish what belongs to art practice from what belongs to artistic research is reminiscent of what in the philosophy of science is known as the demarcation problem. It involves delimiting what can be considered part of science from what cannot, or distinguishing what qualifies as science from mere pseudoscience. Karl Popper's influential views on this question are well known; he argued that openness to falsification was the quality that distinguished science from pseudoscience.

Demarcating our subject matter would amount to formulating one or more principles that distinguish art from pseudo-art — or rather, that distinguish art from non-art. Arthur C. Danto is one writer who has expressed views on this. One of his insights is worth highlighting in our context: no essentialist definition is possible of what art is.

The distinction between art and non-art is a construed one, and it depends on what is recognized as such in the “art world” (the totality of artists, art criticism, art theory, and art industry) at a particular point in time.¹

Such constructivism, which we also encounter in post-Popperian philosophy and sociology of science in thinkers like Paul Feyerabend, Pierre Bourdieu, and Bruno Latour, radically qualifies the problem of demarcation. And this should be a lesson to us as we examine the difference between art and artistic research.

We are interested here not so much in the difference between art and non-art as we are in demarcating the domain of art practice

from the domain of science or research, or the domain of morality, or that of daily life. Here, too, demarcations, dichotomies, definitions, and identities

are problematic — an insight also celebrated in post-structuralism. The issue of the essence of art has been supplanted by that of the dynamics of the art world, where different life domains may meet and interpenetrate one another. Attempts to address this question may be labeled as “boundary work”². In trying to fathom something of the dynamics of the art world, one cannot assume a stable concept of art; the presumed boundaries of that world are the subject of constant debate. Artistic research also qualifies as such boundary work — and in two different directions.

Heidegger

Artistic research is an activity undertaken in the borderland between the art world and the academic world. The topics, the questions, as well as the results of such research are judged, and have meaning, both in the art world and in academia.

And in this respect artistic research appears to differ from more traditional academic research, whose relevance and validity is determined primarily within the community of peers, within the walls of academia, within the world of the universities.

At least that was the image many people had of academic research until recently. That image is now substantially altered. The international debate on the relevance and valorization of academic research, the advent of transdisciplinary research programs, and the recognition of non-traditional forms of knowledge production (such as Mode 2)³ have all shown that the context of justification of academic research lies in both academia and society.



¹ Cf. Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disfranchisement of Art*. New York 1986

² Thomas F. Gieryn, “Boundary Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science”, *American Sociological Review* 48 (December 1983). pp. 781-795

³ Gibbons, Michael et al., *The New Production of Knowledge – The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, London 1994

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, “Die Einheit der Vernunft in der Vielheit ihrer Stimmen”, *Kritik der Vernunft* (Philosophische Texte Band 5), Frankfurt am Main 2009, pp. 117-155



The birth of the autonomous spheres of Art and Aesthetics (duly capitalized) in the eighteenth century was signaled by two publications: Charles Batteux's *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe* (The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle) from 1748 and Alexander G. Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* from 1750. Batteux's work raised three issues. First, the system of fine arts constitutes an autonomous sphere (for Batteux, it comprised painting, sculpture, music, poetry, and dance). Second, these arts converge on a single principle. Third, that principle is the subject matter of philosophical aesthetics. Here ends our little history of Art's emancipation in the eighteenth century.

That history has especially made itself felt since Paul O. Kristeller published his two-part article "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics" in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1951 and 1952. This study, which traces the history of the system of arts from Greek antiquity to the twentieth century, is still broadly authoritative in art history circles today. It often also figures as an implicit assumption in the broader discourse on art. Kristeller's system of arts, by the way, consists of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry, with dance relegated to the second rank (with engraving, gardening, theater, opera, and prose).⁵

Very recently (in the spring of 2009), a remarkable article by James I. Porter appeared in the *British Journal of Aesthetics* entitled "Is Art Modern? Kristeller's 'Modern System of the Arts' Reconsidered."⁶ It presents a radical challenge to Kristeller's "system." Porter claims first of all that "the system of the arts" is a historical construction — and more likely an invention of Kristeller than an accurate description from the historical sources. He then argues that the bond between the presumed autonomous spheres of the arts and of philosophical aesthetics was not as tight as Kristeller claims, and that aesthetic formalism was a twentieth-century aberration. Finally, he attempts to show that the arts are always, and have always been, linked in one way or another to intellectual or moral content. Interestingly, he supports this with evidence from the likes of Clement Greenberg, who, in his well known appeal for materialistic objectivity, flatness, and physical quality, refers to the eighteenth century, claiming that the arts concealed their "mediality" at that time by focusing on literature — that is, on intellectual and moral content and meaning.⁷

Intermezzo 2: The end of art (or how art connects to other life domains)

In the discourse on art, the issue of "the end of art" crops up from time to time, for instance in the work of Danto. In the transition from Greenbergian modernist abstraction to post-modernist art that began in the mid-1960s, Danto saw a rupture that signaled the end of the immanent developmental history of art. Post-historical art had become conceptual; assessing it was based not primarily on sensory perception, but on intellectual consideration (whereby Danto assumes that the two are fundamentally separate). This brought the history of the narrative, pictorial tradition to an end.⁸

Danto varies a theme that has accompanied the "project of the modern" since Georg W.F. Hegel. But the distance to Hegel has grown rather wide. Here is Hegel's voice in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* in the 1820s:

"...Art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it, and found in it alone..."⁹

"...Art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest vocation, something past."¹⁰

"For us, art counts no longer as the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself."¹¹

Those "spiritual needs," "highest vocation," and "truth" have certainly slipped away from us in the course of history. Or at least, few people would venture to utter such grand terms today. But Hegel's "end of art" does not mean that art is not to develop further. Here is Hegel again:

We may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit.¹²

Here, "the end of art" is the end of art's ability to give appropriate expression to the Absolute Spirit. It is a farewell to transcendence, to a glorification of art which had been so celebrated by early-Romantic philosophizing intellectuals but a short time previously.

But perhaps it is better to speak of a "naturalization" or "humanization" of transcendence. Here is Hegel once more:

"Art ...makes Humanus its new holy of holies: i.e., the depths and heights of the human heart as such, mankind in its joys and sorrows, its strivings, deeds, and fates."¹³

After the end of art, art concerns itself with "Humanus." A bond with our concrete human life now steps into the stead of art's bond with the absolute, the infinite.

The end of art means a reconfirmation of art's bond with who we are and where we stand — a reassertion of the connectedness of art to our intellectual and moral life. Today we can endorse this, without referring to Hegel.

Naturalization of transcendence: a metaphysics of art—after its fall

Our current situation lies in the wake of the linguistic and pragmatic turns in theory. The constitutive roles of language and action have superseded "reason" and "reality," which, in traditional epistemology and metaphysics, were the foundations on which the edifice of our knowledge rested. We find ourselves in the wake of the farewell to the grands récits (Lyotard) — in the wake of postmodernism, understood as a poignant, melancholic farewell to modernism, or as a cheerful inauguration of Nietzschean perspectivism. We have discarded our naive belief in meta-narratives, and have grown more modest about our potential to get a grip on physical and social reality.

We are now in a time that follows the clean-up work done by deconstructivism and ordinary language philosophy. The remnants of the once stable framework of meaning, knowledge, and reality that buttressed the edifice of art, science, and morality have now been permanently abandoned on the junk heap of history.

What we now need is a metaphysics of art, after its fall. Also after Hegel's time, naturalization of transcendence means both taking leave of overly high pretensions (which still linger today in the minds of many) as well as preserving the awareness that art has the power, or gives us the power, to critically transcend the reality in which we find ourselves and which we are. That is metaphysics as it is possible after its fall. There is a sense in which the task is to overcome metaphysics and a sense in which the task is to continue metaphysical discussion.¹⁴

Cognizant of the bond between art and our intellectual and moral life, artistic research seeks to achieve a reflective articulation of that critical transcendence. It thereby concerns and affects our relationship to the world and to ourselves.

That is what I have elsewhere called the "realism" of artistic research.

In all this, we should keep two things in mind. First, we experience more than we can say. That does not just apply to art, of course, but to our whole relationship to the world and to other people. Art has no exclusive rights here, but this pre-reflective immediacy particularly manifests itself in creative processes, in works of art, and in artistic experiences. The early-Romantic echo in this wording is no accident. Of course we can no longer fall back on an uncritical understanding of art, and of course art has become reflexive. But here, too, there is a sense in which we are now beyond the vaulting claims of early Romanticism, and a sense in which we are still the heirs of this now naturalized realm of thought. The reflexivity of art — its quality of both questioning itself and giving food for thought, and of thus also showing a "conceptual" dimension — must not be construed in opposition to the, in a philosophical sense, non-conceptual content that lies enclosed in it. In artistic research, we are concerned directly with that pre-reflective, non-conceptual content, as enacted in creative processes and embodied in works of art. In this way, art invites us to critically transcend what is. Artistic research is the acceptance of that invitation.

But at the same time we should bear in mind that we might be wrong in our critical transcendences. That is the fallibilism of artistic research. After all, it offers a fundamentally open perspective on what is or could be. That is the contingency of artistic research — a contingency that derives directly from the fact that the content of art cannot entirely be captured in any epistemological project whatsoever.

Metaphysics of art — after its fall, after the end of art, after postmodernism — means an understanding of art as a critical reflective practice, encompassing non-conceptual content, which sets our aesthetic, intellectual and moral life into motion. It also means an understanding of artistic research as the practice of that fundamentally unfinished critical reflection.

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⁵ Paul O. Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics", Part I and Part II, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 no 4 (October 1951), pp. 496-527, and 13, no 1 (January 1952), pp. 17-46

⁶ James I. Porter, "Is Art Modern? Kristeller's 'Modern System of the Arts' Reconsidered", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49, no 1 (January 2009), pp. 1-24

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6

⁸ Danto 1986, pp. 81-117

⁹ Georg W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: lectures on fine art*, T.M. Knox (trans.), 2 vols., Oxford 1975, p. 1: 10

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1: 11 ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1: 103 ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1: 103 ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 1: 607

¹⁴ Cf. Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*. Harvard UP 1990, p. 19



In 2011 I went to Mali to research the origin and impact of the Festival sur le Niger, an annual theatre, music and visual arts festival in the town of Ségou.

During the Festival sur le Niger, Ségou turns into one big festival site with stages and exhibitions all over and numerous restaurants and little shops on almost every corner selling everything you could wish for. Everyone in town participates in their own way: some attend the performances, others perform, some work as technicians, others provide food and beds for foreign visitors. Over the years the festival grew into an international and interdisciplinary event attracting tens of thousands people, enabling the local community to make most of their yearly living and it became a driver for social, economic and cultural development of the region and beyond.

Wisdom is the fruit of L'arbre à parole, the tree under which people sit and discuss. The skin of the fruit is just simple friendly talking, but the fruit itself is a serious dialogue and leads to wisdom.⁽¹⁾

(Dr Simaga)

Art and medicine

It is this in-between space as a source for development, change, renewal or making that fascinates me. It is a space I know by experience. As a child I wanted to become a dancer or a surgeon, or even better I wanted to be both at the same time. What seemed oneness for me appeared to be two separate worlds for others. So, I had to choose.

It was about 15 years later I saw a short movie⁽²⁾ that gave words to the oneness of dancing and healing I felt was so natural. In this movie Yo-Yo Ma teaches a masterclass. A young woman plays Bach's Cello suite nr 4. Halfway Yo-Yo Ma cuts her off and explains what he doesn't like about her playing. She responds that this is the exact same feedback he gave her years ago in a previous masterclass. Back then he had also told her to make a choice between becoming a physician or a musician. She decided to become a doctor. Now she's back in that same masterclass because she misses the cello.

After what seems a long silence Ma says he remembers and suggests her to work with the Cello as a body and to see and play the suite as process of healing. This way he brings her passion into focus and assembles the two worlds she embodies. The young woman immediately understands what he wants her to do.

The second time she plays Bach's suite it comes to live, and she can unveil its magic and healing power. I didn't become a doctor. I became a dancer, an anthropologist and an entrepreneur.



For me these worlds are one. For the world around me, most of the time they aren't. But times are changing. An increasing emphasis on sustainable and social responsible entrepreneurship shifts our single focussed and fragmented world into a more multiple and interdependent one.

Companies are challenged to generate social, ecological and economic impact at the same time.

By choice these entrepreneurs look at enterprising and organizing from an intertwined worldview; in doing so they bring different values from different worlds into the social

“Art functions as a mirror. The true artists have the magic of showing or telling people who they are and what are their personalities and their environment in a way people can understand it. So art communicates to you. Showing there are other realities surrounding you, it helps you to see the possibilities how to improve your own situation. Historically for Mali, if we have to tell the truth, in the change for the democracy in this country, artists have taken the first step. They open peoples' eyes in what was going on in society”

(Abdramane Dicko, USAID Economist)

“Art was part of life, of society, Maaya is a concept of life, a life philosophy. Art plays an important role in the development and establish-

ment of a stable and peaceful society ... Art has already played a role here in Mali in transforming the dictatorship towards democracy. Many exhibitions showed work in which artists were criticizing dictatorship. Many plays, musical performances expressed criticism. For instance, Ismaël Diabaté made a large painting symbolizing people dying of the oppression in the 90s. Artists still contribute to the enforcement of democracy with for instance songs, paintings and drama.”

(Hama Goro)

Bringing contemporary art into the Festival sur le Niger, art for the sake of art, was viewed with suspicion. It felt as breaking the link between what seemed naturally connected and as questioning the wholeness and interdependency of things.

Yet it didn't turn out that way. Somehow contemporary and traditional art evolved in an intertwined and mutually influencing way. The language of art, contemporary and traditional, remained a strong voice in the becoming of the festival and the social development of the region.

The In-Between Space

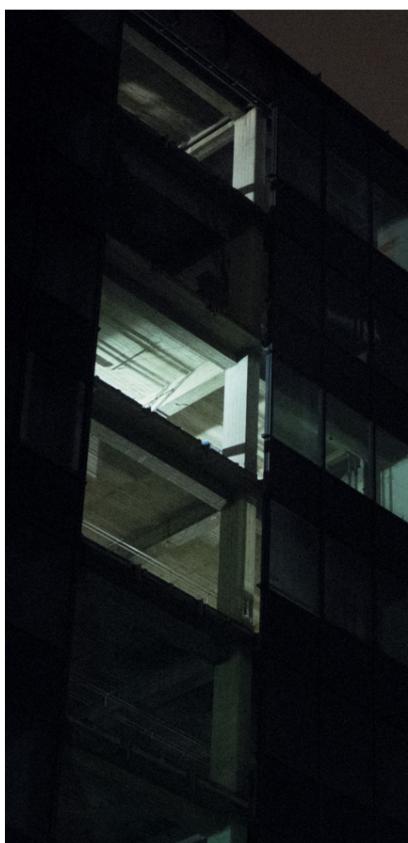
Staying with the trouble when diversity meets

Godelieve Spaas

It all started with a group of hotel owners, coming together wondering how to attract more visitors to Ségou, staying more than just a day on their way to Timbuktu. Many ideas were passed around, even an African carnival. The group favoured the festival and one of them, Mamou Daffé, stepped forward to enrich and realize that idea with and for the benefit of the whole community. The Festival sur le Niger became a cultural and entrepreneurial process aiming for social development. It is a community-based concept of entrepreneurship that combines traditional and contemporary art with local Maaya culture and a more general concept of entrepreneurship.

The beauty of the becoming of this festival lies in what I experienced as continuous process of balancing between old and new, between community and business, between contemporary and traditional art and between I and we.

The festival literally evolved from a space in between disciplines, in between organisations and in between incumbency and renewal. A space in which people relate to each other and their environment in the process of defining a next step or idea representing different worlds in one movement. A space which one of the godfathers of the Festival describes as:



entrepreneurial frame, thus developing social entrepreneurship into a multilanguage game (Beschorner, 2013).

When diversity meets

This is exactly what I saw happening in Segou. The organisation of the Festival sur le Niger is owned by the community as well as the artists, its founders and local entrepreneurs. A continuous dialogue. L'arbre à parole bridges the differences between various worlds. One of the gaps to overcome in Ségou is the one between traditional and contemporary art.

“Traditionally, art is part of day-to-day life. It reflects the important things in life and symbolizes important transformations in life. Being an artist is something that is given to you by birth. You perform your art for and with the community. I look at art differently. I want to express what I experience, what I see, what's in me and I want to create my own reflections on society.”⁽³⁾

(Hama Goro)

The idea of L'art pour l'art isn't understood well in Ségou. Traditionally art is seen as one of the levers for change.

⁽¹⁾ Dr Simaga, a pharmacist, expert on Maaya and godfather of the Festival sur le Niger

⁽²⁾ Yo-Yo Ma, inspired by Bach, Sarabande, a film by Atom Egoyan, Rhombus Media 1997

⁽³⁾ Hama Goro, Malian artist and initiator of Centre Soleil d'Afrique

⁽⁴⁾ Prof. Louise O. Fresco has been the President of the Wageningen University & Research Executive Board since 1 July 2014

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The Festival sur le Niger is an example of Bechorner's multilanguage development of a social entrepreneurial initiative. In Ségou making meaning, rethinking society or setting up a business is a communal and therefore multilingual process inevitably including art.

Sustainable people

At heart I am an artist, researcher and social entrepreneur. By profession I am a consultant. I work with people in companies that want to make difference. People who consider themselves and the organisations they are part of as co-makers of our society and keepers of the earth. Louise Fresco⁴ wonders if we, as human beings, are developing towards what she calls Homo Durabilis: sustainable people.

"Will we as a group evolve, biologically, socially and culturally, to a species that adapts to its environment in such a way that it can be used to fulfil all its material and intangible needs, but at the same time closes its cycles as much as possible, so that satisfying our needs does not lead to destruction or depletion of additives? And, if that happens, will we be able to come up with the right alternatives?"

(Fresco 2014)

It is that last question that makes scientists reach out to artists. If we co-create our world we need to know what is right. For that we must be able to give meaning to and understand the impact of our actions and take that into consideration when deciding what to create, invite and foster.

Fresco argues we need artists in becoming sustainable people because of their ability to question our certainties, to denote the unsayable and to evoke the impossible.

I am a consultant who invites people in the multilanguage game or in the in-between space. The space between art, science and entrepreneurship. Most of the time implicitly but since a couple of years explicitly for example in a project at Rabobank's corporate art department.



They asked me to give art a voice within the bank. As natural as that seemed to me, we had to reason why art is important for a bank.

One of the first exhibitions we organised was curated by Louise Fresco. She unveiled stories of art works and linked them to questions and developments in the circular economy, inviting people to experiment with different perspectives and ideas on changing our economic system.

The meaning of art for companies lies in the acknowledgement of people and organisations being co-creators of our society and culture and being keepers of the earth. We are part of an interdependent socio-ecosystem.

Staying with the trouble

In a way I find myself in a position opposite to Mamou Daffé's when he ignited the Festival sur le Niger. Local culture, Maaya, emphasizes the wholeness of life. The bank focusses on the entrepreneurial side of life. In Ségou art needs to be untangled from society, from communal traditions, in order to transform into an independent activity, to become an act

of an independent artist. Art and artists need to develop a separate meaning for art, distinct from its meaning in traditional daily life. This untangling from traditional values is necessary to reconnect with local culture from a different, more autonomous perspective. It is about creating a free space where art can find its own quality, its specific contribution to today's society.

At the Rabobank we walk a similar path from the opposite direction. Art is autonomous, so is the bank. Art has meaning in itself as has the bank. The quest is how to connect separate worlds without losing either one's unique quality or independency. Art is valuable in itself as is science, or entrepreneurship.

The quality of the in-between space lies as much in the nodes as on the interfaces. The autonomy of the nodes, of art, science and entrepreneurship is conditional for what can emerge in the in-between space.

At the Rabobank I am a curator of knowledge, proposing new perspectives on organizational development benefitting people, planet and profit. Together with artists, scientists, people working at the bank and many

others we make mosaics of ideas, insights, art works, stories and day-to-day banking reality. I invite artists and people from the bank in a process of interdependent co-development or continuous "becoming with" (Haraway, 2010).

In practice it means staying with the trouble diversity generates. Bridging opposites, disciplines and sectors, uplifting insights to open new pathways of thinking and doing, translating between different languages, balancing between autonomy and oneness, between purpose and action and between art, science and entrepreneurship.

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Denizens of the Border



Josephine Baan

I am here to ask you what I ask of myself. To ask how we can be more. How we can be together differently. How we can be we. Because who is 'we' anyway?

I do not wish to imply the existence of any comprehensible answers to these queries. For the most part, I believe that asking the right questions is a more fertile ground for progress or change than it is to give the right answers. Answers indicate finitude, a case closed. The right kinds of questions take up space, make uncomfortable, demand we wriggle about in different directions. Questions indicate movement.

It is here that movement becomes essential. Through movement, one is able to gain a better understanding of the space they inhabit; to grasp the ongoing conditions, structures, and limits of that space. I refer to space here in the broadest sense of the word. Space might entail one's physical surroundings, the material world shaped by form and substance. But it also applies to the numerous ephemeral realms that make up our quotidian reality; the mental, emotional, bodily, spiritual, social, cultural, ecological, economic and political spaces that we are borne into.



To know the limits is equivalent to knowing the possibilities. For not only do limits delineate the borders within which a space is to be traversed; more importantly, they indicate what points of entry we may have to extend beyond those limits. It is through inquiry of said borders that we are able to enlarge the spaces we inhabit. To jump the fence into the unknown and make room for new thoughts, new knowledges, new ways of being. Balancing the border like a tightrope walker, one might come across irregularities, voids or loopholes. We must approach the border, then, not as an answer. It must not mark the end of the line, must not call to a halt. Rather, the border becomes a space to dwell, to feel one's way around in; and cross over.

Borders possess a sacrosanct quality, generally enduring unquestioned. Ostensibly perennial, how and why borders were established in the first place is often subject to a type of collective amnesia. Whereas in Europe, for example, geographical borders as we know them today are in fact only a fairly recent development. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 founded the first officially marked and agreed upon boundaries between European countries. What ensued was the creation of unified, albeit composite, national identities, by means of which one's sense of self became forcibly and inherently tied to a demarcated piece of land.

Both developments ultimately served as tools for those in power to control the movement of a people, deterring individuals from moving beyond 'their' country as a result of emotional and physical impasse. People equal workforce. Therefore, a greater number of people equals a greater amount of economic profit and as such, curbing movement is highly desirable.¹ It is not without reason that those peoples who are wanderers by nature (i.e. Gypsies, Jews, Bedouins, to name a few) have been historically feared, oppressed, expelled, persecuted and made impossible

to live in accordance with their ways, to the point of eradication.

The ratification of commonly accepted borders thus enforced an aggregated kind of community that would otherwise never have existed, the process of which causing widespread displacement, disbandment and the rise of a number of diaspora. Simultaneously, the imposition of a collective national identity forms a definite means to single out everything that does not fall within its limits. The double entendre of 'us,' is 'them.' 'You' and 'me,' 'mine' and 'yours,' 'ours' and 'theirs' automatically follow suit. In the construction of a (national) self, the other materializes; a first step towards establishing the threat of difference.

Boundaries drawn in inclusion or exclusion of groups of people each lay a claim to authenticity, naturalizing the separation, estrangement and injustice that stems from such an act. This claim to realness demands to be questioned, as is eloquently described in the words of Maggie Nelson:

"...any fixed claim on realness, especially when it is tied to an identity, also has a finger in psychosis. If a man who thinks he is a king is mad, a king who thinks he is a king is no less so."²

It is here that any principle of we becomes a precarious one. Who is we? Who is included? Who is excluded? And why? How are the boundaries of a we defined? We implies solidarity, a standing strong together. Does this not also imply that in solidarity there can be no exclusion, no oppression, and no exploitation? Looking at the word itself, one is quick to realise that solidarity is composed of two opposing constituents. 'Solid' refers to firmness, resilience, density and stability; whereas 'arity' (as in: air) suggests weightlessness, effervescence, levity and flow. Solidarity, then, requires both resolution as well as space to move. It is not either/or, it is and/and.

The ways in which physical borders impair movement is relatively easier to pinpoint than other types of restriction are. Often it is made plain and simple where and how we are permitted to move our bodies; a stamp in a passport; a line on the map; a fence around a home; the markings on the pavement. We allow ourselves to be directed by these signs, diverting from doors that are marked 'NO ENTRY,' from files that have been stamped 'DISCLOSED.' Often, as with any border, we fail to question who made this sign, or why we have not been granted access to whatever lies beyond it. Entering would mean trespassing, a criminal offence punishable by law.

More complex are the less obvious structures that govern the movement of a people, for not all bodies are granted equal mobility. We know by now that white bodies enjoy greater freedom of movement than bodies of colour; that bodies from the global West are less restricted than bodies from the rest of the world; that hetero, cis, male, able bodies are less subject to injustice or abuse than female, gay, non-binary and disabled bodies. What then, are the ambiguous limits of being that we arbitrarily abide by? What borders have we internalized, both in our thinking and our doing, that not only condone these restrictions but in fact, reinforce them?

Learning to understand the ways in which a body is permitted to move is a practice of unearthing the ways in which the mind is permitted to move. And besides prompting the question: where am I allowed to move? We must ask ourselves: where do I allow myself to move? And more importantly: where is the other allowed to move, and where do I allow the other to move?

For if we want to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different, we must reassess the very quality of every single aspect of our lives. To confront ourselves with the limits, but also the pliability, of our very own being. It is precisely here that work cannot be separated from life; the personal cannot be separated from the political; the spiritual cannot be separated from the earthly; and the mind cannot be separated from the body.

Thusly we might begin to understand what structures are keeping the world in place, and above all, what structures are keeping the world in a bad place. To see what we have learned to trust and uphold, regardless if it is blatantly oppressive or accountable for the suffering of others. If we live by standards that make it difficult or even impossible for others to live, then how can we justify this as a good life? Who, exactly, is being served by the parameters that have once been laid out?

My skin delimits the border between the internal and external world. The skin, unyielding and yet so adaptable, so renewable, is simultaneously the only thing connecting the two. On wintery nights, it wraps itself around my flesh in a cold embrace. In heat, it droops and drips like wet cloth. Skin reflects shame and passion in vibrant red flush, or pale white stupor in sudden fright. And below the single caress of a gentle hand, any division between outside and inside disintegrates. The inner and outer collapse in on itself. All difference is dismantled. The 'you' and 'me' dichotomy briefly relinquished. Nonetheless, the act of caressing or being caressed demands great courage, for it requires an intimacy, a closeness, that renders both parties vulnerable. Vulnerability puts one at risk of becoming forever altered. It is precisely this type of transformation that can lessen the threat of difference.

www.friendlystalking.nl

¹ Sergei V. Sevastianov, Jussi P. Laine & Anton A. Kireev, Introduction to Border Studies, 2015

² Maggie Nelson, The Argonauts, 2015

Unfinish

Blurring facets of a “retiring” artist

Katja Langeland

The “back office”

It was never my intention to live as an artist, I rather always wanted to be a poet or writer or journalist. Working with artistic modes of thinking and working slowly captured my world as a young woman. While I was still in art school, I gradually abandoned my usual working modes rooted deeply in observing my outside world by means of artistic translation, meaning digital materialized traces (video and installation) and showing a visual outcome in some context, meaning some artwork in some exhibition having some title and claiming something, even though it always felt “unfinished”¹.

Thinking and writing have always been my main but mostly invisible tools. As I grew older, my artistic work became meaningless to me and whenever I tried to evoke it again, the hidden processes became prominent, like reflecting about the working conditions, realizing a project rather with friends than alone, reflecting about the way I work and think, the appreciation of the unperceptible stages of my work.

Additionally, the longer I worked in the artistic realm, my non-artistic and rather managerial and personal competencies were required more often in order to help art to happen at all. As I got deeper involved in the “back office”-activities of art, it were no longer the obvious public results and effects but the covert processes around art that engaged me: How can I help to create a sustainable breeding environment in a neoliberal and rapidly capitalized world, for art and its creators - not only by means of exhibitions under mostly precarious conditions and with some personal ego-pushing agenda? I became less and less interested in visuals and artefacts but started to care for the in-between, for the invisible cloud around artistic practices, for what is usually left blank, forgotten, disdained.

Does that mean I stopped being an artist? My thinking and writing remains, but is the rest of my artistic mode expiring?

Friends and accomplices

On my initial way through artistic academia I have neither met a lot of friends² nor accomplices³, maybe because I was rather interested in pop, main stream and at that time underrepresented digital and media art, and I behaved very un-arty (e.g. I was a non-smoker, married, having a heavy interest in all kinds of cross-overs to art, like theory, philosophy, computer science, literature, etc.). My original and very naive view on art was from a technically motivated side. I worked mostly auto-didactic with a focus on computers, professional expertise and high visual standards inspired by the main-stream cinema - instead of the to me at that time clearly embarrassing “dilettantism” I often observed with my artistic colleagues in art school, which I could neither appreciate nor understand.

It was only after finishing my formal education in art, that I allowed my artistic comprehension to evolve, and I started to value the concepts of persisting friendship (not only with artists but also designers, philos-

ophers and other inspiring people with all sorts of interesting backgrounds) and transitory modes of complicity (working with thrilling people, especially in the arts, on projects). (Co-)Creating experiments and assisting others to find new or not yet established modes of artistic working freed me from my endemic perfectionism. It allowed me to explore new forms of approval for art and to convey them to myself and others.

This was mostly evident to me when I was working with a group of Austrian philosophers called “Die Philosophischen Versuchsreihen”⁴, and for the sake of our mission I started to wear a white lab coat and to execute group performances - two things I would never have integrated into my own artistic work, yet in this new setup as a group, I could simply embrace new modes of working and presenting in hybrid academic contexts between art and culture. I became part of a manifold discourse about aesthetics and perception, which I probably would not have understood just by myself nor would I have dared to engage with it and in it alone.

Years later I had to transform my weakening artistic interest into “something” for a group exhibition with two of my closest friends⁵ for the exhibition “blank_office”⁶. I knew, that the general expectation was to produce a proper art exhibition - however, I was highly surprised as we could together shift the normal display-focus subtly to something else, which made me feel at ease even before the opening: I “only” showed my desk, my notes, some books in a shelf and folders of printed pages from my diary about the turmoil and unrest of writing and producing art. It was especially the long process of discussing and developing this format and to adapt the presented works and our diverse “ways of doing things” together during long skype sessions, unfortunately seldom personal meetings and often chainy e-mail correspondences with lots of attachments that stayed in my mind. For my next - again unintended - follow up exhibition project, I extended this collaboration format into a personal work called “unfinish_dialog”⁷ (2016) which “only” presented my desk and a list of people I contacted during the opening hours.

Maybe I did not change the art world, but art changed my world and it gave me a new vocabulary to communicate and to voice my thoughts in a more universal manner - however I felt most free when I could break out of the standardized artistic conventions and simply show parts of my work and thoughts, whether they were considered art, text, whatever - as long as I had my accomplices and friends around me to help me “stretch” myself.

Breeding environments

For a long time, I deliberately did not want to become a mother, meaning I did not feel ready to have kids even though I seemed to have “perfect” conditions - a well-earning husband, improving living conditions, a first stable job after a long period of study, an apparent settled life concept not intersecting at all with my artistic sideline - or the other way around.

However, I became pregnant only after I gave up nearly everything stable in my life. It was after my divorce, after I desillusionedly quit a “dream job” in academia due to the unbearable working conditions my former boss and doctoral advisor created for me and our whole team, as I eventually allowed my private and artistic sides to finally work together and started my own business. Bad timing. Then I decided against my burgeoning feminist side: I agreed to follow my new partner, whom I still deeply love - and sometimes of course hate and fear for the things he can bring out in me - and I bittersweetly left the country I finally started to feel home in, to continue being with him. Consequently, I had to give up my professional autonomy as well, which had become a small but slowly up-and-coming one-woman business called “digital_office”, where I started to actually earn money by realizing other people’s design works and artistic projects.

It was during the chaos of the moving, dissolving the business, being mostly alone in between half-packed moving boxes, growing piles of paperwork and watching myself saying goodbye over and over again during melancholic farewell dinners, that I lost a stack of non-growing cells that were lovingly created before all of this new reality broke in. Months later, in the new unholy country where I still felt strange and unwanted, I found myself sitting again at the doctor’s because of uneasiness, while she was telling me I was already 12 weeks pregnant. She wondered how I could not have realized the growing life right away. But I was in the midst of a job-hunt, hiding my depression, feeling deeply sorry for the “lives” I left behind; and also - only sometimes, silently - I considered in the back of my head when to actually start preventing safely again. I frankly told the people who had just chosen to hire me about my new situation and they simply said, to my complete surprise, they would like to work with me, pregnant or not.

My job description actually did not exist beforehand and no one had worked in this position before. So I chose for my new job-goal as artistic associate at a Swiss art school to enable others to be artistic and to realize their own potential, something I deeply missed during my own artistic education. I had two wonderful supervisors (artists!) who gave me the freedom and support I needed to do my job as best as I could. They were especially keen on launching new projects, establishing new contacts and working methods, which is - as you might assume - what I still really yearn for. So on one hand I became a “mid wife” for mostly young but also more mature people striving to be artists, while on the other hand I was supporting established artists working at the academy to deal with the up-and-downsides of the institutionalized world.

I worked until the week I gave birth to Mathilda and I started to work again after 14 weeks at home, working harder and more intensely than before: travelling, lecturing, visiting exhibitions and symposia, pumping milk, keeping a tight organization about who-cares-when for my baby, organizing exhibitions and talks, unvoluntarily also producing - no, declaring some personal output as artistic work of mine (see “friends and accomplices” section) - and sometimes simply taking Mathilda along with me to employee meetings, exhibition set ups, crisis meetings and evening events.

Three years later I voluntarily quit my position in order to finally finish my PhD, I am awaiting my 2nd baby soon and I gradually gave rise to a new path to follow my professional journey - this time officially and really outside the art and academia “bubble”. I am preparing my return “home”, “home-home”, my little family hopefully following me to East-Germany, after living more than 18 years anywhere but not “home” and not paying any attention to this neglected legacy of mine until now.

“A she-wolf”

I often feel like a wolf in a sheep’s clothing. Maybe I have never been a real artist. But I have always cared for art. Today, I can allow myself to speak freely and without remorse about my fears of failure while I was studying art, the pressure to make a proper living by playing the game of art and academic striving after my education, and the deep dilemma of always looking out for something else than (or not only) art - meaning the longing (and rising) for love, kids, a family, personal and professional steadfastness involving also a lot of “non-art” activities. Today, I simply consider myself as a “supporting infrastructure”: my thoughts can alter others and I can adapt to others, I have the power to change and to bring change privately and professionally.

However, my future working area will obviously break with art and academia, and for some of my “allies” I might commit treason since I am going to work for a “real” company with “real” jobs - I will work with people who might operate and behave differently than the artists or intellectuals I am used to.

“Non-Artists” are asking me, how am I able to somehow “switch” the stages; they want to know what other background I might have, what else I might have studied to suddenly be able to work in this new environment. I often simply say that I am well-trained to get people to do impossible projects. I often also sound like a politician, saying I want to give back to the area I grew up in some of the many things I learned and received in all these years abroad. I also sometimes say that I long for a home for me and my kids, that I am a family-person. Some artists are asking me why I am “suddenly” changing sides, and I sometimes say, I really want to make a difference this time, I do not want to get stopped by institutionalized madness, I want to help to create a better space for the people I work with. Others, who do not know the full details of my new plan (since I still feel a bit at unease about speaking it out loud), are asking me why I quit a good job at an art school, and I am claiming my partner will take care of me until the new baby comes and I have finished my dissertation. I do not know who does believe all of this. I sometimes do, and the others as well. Let’s see. I am a retiring artist, mellowed with age.

I still have a big dream to set up my own art- and culture space with a gallery or exhibition space, an art laboratory for kids, an atelier for visiting artists, a library, maybe a printing workshop, some offices for theorists, writers, philosophers, whoever, along with a nice café - maybe all of these things combined - in collaboration with my friends and accomplices, who - I am sure would immediately support me in this endeavour. By that time in the future, I sincerely hope no one will ask me if I still consider myself an artist. I am really losing this arty skin and yet it keeps renewing itself over and over again, changing my looks but not my calling.

References: Céline Condorelli, *The Company She Keeps*. Céline Condorelli in conversation with Nick Aikens, Avery F. Gordon, Johan Frederik Hartle, Polly Staple. London: Book Works, London: Chisenhale Gallery and Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2014. Peter Lunenfeld, ed., *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999. Gesa Ziemer, *Complicity. New Perspectives on Collectivity*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016

¹ »The unfinished work or person allows us to read our own desires into a not yet fully formed object opening up more space for pleasure and identification than any “complete” work or person can ever offer. (...) To celebrate the unfinished in this era of digital ubiquity is to laud process rather than goal - to open up a third thing that is not a resolution, but rather a state of suspension.« (Peter Lunenfeld, 1999:8)

² »Friendship is a fundamental aspect of personal support, a condition of doing things together that deserve substantial attention; (...) Friendship, like support, is considered here as an essentially political relationship, one of allegiance and responsibility. Perhaps one of my favourite definitions of cultural production, and especially making exhibitions is that of “making things public”: the process of connecting things, establishing relationships, which in many ways means befriending issues, people, contexts. Friendship in this sense is both a set-up for working and a dimension of production. (...)« (Céline Condorelli, 2014:7)

³ »Complicity signifies the “quality of doing with” [Mittäterschaft] and is defined in criminal law as an act’s three steps of resolution, planning and execution. The concept is related to illegal behavior and almost exclusively endowed with negative connotations. (...) Complicity is thus used when handling structures creatively, when these are altered, adapted or even reinvented. It is hence mainly the expression of creative work and in the process crops up across all fields of work and social milieus and not only in those ascribed a high level of creativity, such as art or other creative branches. (...)« (Gesa Ziemer, 2016:10, 11)

⁴ English translation: “the philosophical test series”, (URL: <http://philosophischeversuchsreihen.at>), I am a member since 2010

⁵ My two dear friends are the Rotterdam based artist Kathrin Wolkowicz (URL: <http://www.kathrinwolkowicz.net/>) and the Canadian-German artist Manuela Büchting (URL: <http://manuebuechting.com/>)

⁶ »The exhibition “blank_office” (“_____ office”) switches the exhibition space into a think- and work area, and oscillates between the show room and the office. On tables and other furniture, works and processes will be outlaid, and thus can be perceived tangibly and intellectually. Some works are still in process and others have been worked on for a very long time. (...)» Translation from the press release 2015, “blank_office”, Erfrischungsräum Rössligasse, Lucerne, Switzerland, group exhibition, October 2015

⁷ »“unfinish_dialog” (“Runde Sieben”, K25 exhibition space, Lucerne, Switzerland, group exhibition, January 2016) is a reaction due to the shortage of time in my life. Projects and thoughts want to start, pause, cease, hush and get neglected. unfinish_dialog wants to revisit these projects and thoughts by releasing kind of radical impulses to foster intensive dialogs with ten of my most important partners in art, philosophy and innovation. I am a fresh mother, who works, loves, talks, sleeps, organizes, cleans, feeds the cat, cooks, commutes, does the laundry and tries to engage in an active artistic discourse. That is why this form of forced dates was chosen in order to pick up all the paused thoughts and strings to open up a small opportunity, a little window, for thought exchange and fresh air. But I did not want to talk at home, invisible to anyone. The important process of having a target date and the effort of keeping it, all preparations and also the aftermath should have been visible - right in front of my desk right within a public exhibition (...). However, my original planning played quite differently during the realization ... “ (taken from the later publication “unfinish_dialog”, 2017)

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Parenthood and a curiosity for life

Bérénice Staiger

In the following text you will find a description how I decided to become a parent and what influence it had on my art practice. The process of becoming parents started long before our child was born. It required a lot of discussions over the years until we knew what we wanted. Even after our son was born we made the choice to reserve a lot of our time to be with him. I am happy that we have the choice to do so.

It was a very conscious process to make the decision to become parents, because we both work as artists and run our own businesses. That means no security at all. But instead we have a lot of freedom. What to do with so much freedom? And what to do with so many choices? When to choose the right moment in a time where everything seems only a question of the right moment and the right decision? All happiness seems feasible. It seems possible to plan everything. I disagree. **Not everything can be realised by the power of will.**

There are more obstacles to overcome to become parents, for example the biological differences between man and women. I had the longing to become a mother for many years already. With the longing for being a mother a decision was not made yet. Then, there were also doubts and fears. It took us years to decide. Once the decision was made it did

not make us parents instantly. It took another few years until I finally was expecting. I will never forget this amazing joy that I felt. That moment I knew I was expecting a child. **Most of all I felt a big relief that my body finally did what I felt it was supposed to.**

In the beginning of my pregnancy I could experience peace while not doing anything. This was very unusual for me. Usually in the evenings after supper I kept on working, but once I was pregnant I did not want to do anything. **My body was working. It was making a child!** I could relax.

Now I am a mother I want to spend time with my child, but **also when I am with my child I think about matters that concern my art practice.** When he sleeps during the day or in the evenings and when he is at day-care I have time to write down my ideas or to work in the studio. **There is less time but I can enjoy the moment better. Time is more precious.** I am less worried about my art practice. Which gives me a lot of space and less pressure.

Dedicating our time to our child is the secret that I am enjoying motherhood so much. Being a mother is my number one priority project. I take time to be with my child. Of course I am also thankful for the days that he goes to day-care. On those days I have time to work, to develop my art practice or/and to do my bread-and-butter-job. Before our son was born I was wondering what I want-

ed to pass on to him. I realised that I found it important that he would learn my mother tongue. I want him to know the culture from the area I grew up in. I also want him to learn about traditions from my native country. To keep these traditions alive I practise them in my everyday life.

This cultural heritage inspires me also in my art practice. **Traditions - especially how people cherish memories about them - fascinate and inspire me.** These memories can be a starting point for a drawing or a community project.

Being a parent means also being socially engaged. Many decisions need to be made. As a parent I cannot escape discussions about raising a child. There are many scholars who have written on this issue. Reading too much, for example, can be confusing and can take your attention away from your own experience and observations. I believe my intuition and my observation are very important regarding the wellbeing of my child. I am happy that I can contact other parents, mostly mothers, to share our experiences and discuss issues; this helps to sharpen my awareness and knowledge.

I am interested in a socially engaged art practice because I believe the discourse with a community is very helpful to understand one's own ideas and preferences. Working in a community means also that one has to formulate one's ideas. Both as a moth-

er and an artist I am interested in benefiting from the knowledge of a community.

Therefore I enjoy initiating projects which include people and communities in collaboration and debate. I see it also as an educational experience. **When communities meet and work towards a common goal, they raise awareness through conversation.**

Besides being a mother and an artist I also fit in a bread-and-butter-job for which I am grateful. **This job gives me freedom in my art practice. Thanks to this job my art practice can be independent.**

Below you find a small list of books which I believe are interesting concerning this topic:

Osho - Courage: The Joy of Living Dangerously
Sabine Wassenberg - Kinderlogica filosoferen op een multiculturele school
Laura van Dolron - Wij
Laura van Dolron - Liefhebben
Oliver Sacks - Gratitude

