

Seven remarks on artistic research

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Creativity is similar in art and science: the faculty for seeing beyond given patterns, already known phenomena, for relating to the tradition and exceed it. What is pattern recognition for someone is chaos for another.

I am the first doctoral candidate to graduate from the University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre – Dramatiska Institutet, in Stockholm, Sweden. The work has resulted in a dissertation, *Inter esse. The creative subject, Norén and Reality* (Zetterfalk, 2008), and a documentary film, *Norén's drama* (Zetterfalk, 2007). At its centre is the artistic formation and, as an extension, the scientific formation. The purpose of the work is to reflect on the way from ambition to creation, to capture what about this process is unique.

The title *Inter esse*, to be in-between, says something about what kind of work this is: in-between art and science, in-between theory and practice and, also, in-between institutions. My ambition as a researcher is to illuminate artistic formation, but my thesis does not hold everything. The text passes into a filmic essay on the creative subject. It depicts the Swedish playwright Lars Norén's direction of a new work for the theatre and is an attempt to widen the scientific framework, which problematises my position as a researcher.

To me, "artistic research", the commonly used but rather vague term for the field, means a meeting between artistic and scientific processes. I find it necessary not to treat these two processes as each other's opposites. Instead, dialogue is required. My aim therefore is to test and motivate new ways into artistic and scientific results, which bring about a discussion of the process, the work and criteria for the meeting place between knowledge objects.

The intertraditional between art and science, which my research is an example of, creates tensions between forms. With the result I move the aesthetic dimension into the centre. My arguments and expressions about the creative process contain in a conscious way a gliding that can be followed.

But the director as researcher is a position that seems to be difficult to recognize and evaluate. Therefore I will present seven remarks on the reception of results within artistic research.

1. The new results demand a thorough response

The important background and motive to my venture, I describe in the introduction to my thesis. As one of the first in this position in Sweden, the examples of artistic research have, at least in Sweden, been in short supply. And there was no collected international overview. I have tried to give an account of what there were, but my endeavour had no obvious forerunners. And also, there were no given questions.

The criteria were, and are, vague and there was, and is, no agreement about what is considered a valuable result.

This is confirmed by reports from the Swedish Research Council. The discussion on theory and method has not been particularly advanced. There has been a lack of documentation and reflection on artistic processes. Furthermore, there have been no relevant models and criteria for a concurrent evaluation of analytical and artistic qualities. More astounding there was a lack of frameworks for evaluation of quality within art.

If a researcher is working on a new field, where there are no map or criteria, then a criticizer cannot afterwards maintain the opposite. There are critics of artistic research who claim that there were rules of the game for this new field already before the first artistic researchers began their processes. This is a wrong picture of the conditions for the work.

The actual results that now exist put demands on the people that are supposed to respond to them. Today, at least in Sweden, it is difficult to receive a thorough and qualified response. Without close examinations of actual examples, which contribute to the formulation of criteria, the field will not develop.

2. The artistic process can and should be illuminated

The new field of research is not about philosophical and theoretical aspects on form, that is creation. It is about formation, that is the creative process. The artistic process is based in people's need to express themselves.

There is a strong tradition when it comes to artistic work that also characterizes the public conversation on art and research. Namely, that artistic work processes cannot be spoken about. And if they are considered possible to speak about, at least they are not more reliable than the actual works of art.

My research takes a completely opposite position towards such as mystification of the origins of creation. Instead my aim is to depict the concrete actions and reasoning that contributes to the finished work.

There is something clear about a completed work of art, but from the outside one cannot take part of all the thoughts and feelings that lead to the artistic creation. Though, it is possible to share the artist's experiences on how he or she has achieved the result: what he or she has abandoned, where and when she or he has made a decision.

Also, this is nothing new. It has been described in the humanities. This does not make the scientist to the one and only authority on the artistic process. Also, it has been described by a long row of artistic practitioners. But this does not make the artist to the one and only authority on the process – neither if he or she says that he or she cannot speak about it, nor if he or she writes extensively on the same matter.

3. Creative processes require close reading

There is no uniform creative process. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize about creativity and creative persons. If you are to better understand the complexity of the creative process, close reading of concrete examples are required.

To give form to a creative process means basic research. The power within such processes must be communicated with precision and exactness. This demands close reading and great attention to both detail and the whole – also from those who are evaluating the results. The concrete is unique, ambiguous and disappearing. If you don't become absorbed on the concrete level, it is difficult to understand to what all this contributes.

4. Recognize the double role

The new field art and research, at least in the way I have approached it, means a paradigm shift with a built-in asymmetry. Without a given discourse a position with inherent contradictions is created. This has consequences for both the process and the result.

If one does not know what to meet, as on this field in-between traditions, then you are not only able to but should put your questions more open. Therefore the approach of the artistic researcher, at least at this point in time, ought to be explorative, investigating. Also, it can be argued whether the process in itself is a question or actually part of the question.

As an artistic researcher I investigate artistic formation and, as an extension, scientific formation. The position must be investigated and problematised in practice. Discussions on artistic research are often built upon a common premise: a dialectic relation between the traditions, an assumption that they in their nature should be uniform and incompatible. They are not. Rather they are heterogeneous and divided. A concept such as art or science may deepen but also limit a perspective.

A difficulty with the subject creativity is on the one hand the distance of the observer, and on the other hand the lack of distance of the creative person himself or herself. Therefore, I myself chose to act as both an observer and an artistic practitioner. It is a difficult but clear and conscious strategy, where I put the field of tension within myself. In doing so I go further than the forerunners within humanities by creating myself. In doing so I also go further than the artists writing on their work processes by reflecting on my process within the framework of a thesis, which raises particular demands on transparency and analysis.

The relationship between observing artists at work and work yourself as an artist is a red thread through my entire work, in the text as well as in the film. This relationship, also, is object to a separate analysis in my thesis.

The characteristics and abilities of the creative person naturally have bearing on a creative process, no matter what tradition. Exactly where the discipline boundary between one thing and the other lies within me is a genuine question, which has been expressed in many ways in the process and also through the result. To do both means a gliding. If one is serious about artistic research, this interplay will be central.

The artistic researcher being unsure about the position, in-between traditional disciplines, goes with the territory. But these initial difficulties should not force artistic research back to the old dualistic model of roles between so called artists on the one hand and so called researchers on the other. Instead, the receivers of artistic research results should follow the artistic researcher in his or her practical problem solving.

5. Recognize the intertraditional

One may see the two paradigms art and science as parallel methods in a changing relationship. There has been a mutual borrowing between them through history. Within science it is important that the claim is true or at least probable. In the beginning of a dissertation, traditionally, one puts forward a problem: one or more questions, one or more statements. In art there is, contrary to science, a lot that remains unspoken. There, the specific point of view often plays a decisive role. Each thought has a form. Even the most uniquely articulated written text therefore is a figure of thought. What cannot be understood in any other way is sometimes called the ineffable, and this also relates to the development of human knowledge.

My result consists of two artefacts, one text and one film, that stand by themselves but together also constitutes a whole. It is not just a foundation and an argument for a new interdisciplinary genre, but brings together art and science in one approach: the intertraditional.

Transparency is necessary. To understand the way of a researcher, it is important to follow his or her steps. This could, as in my case, mean a somewhat different, partly unorthodox mapping of the field.

Art theory, it might be argued, anticipates the way of art in that it tries to point out unconscious structures in works of art. I assume the work of art as a succession of choices made by the artist and consider a certain awareness of and feeling for the resistance of the material should be a minimum demand on an art critic. But there is often a lack of empathy for the work process among the art critics raised in the school of aesthetic science.

6. Recognize the levels of communication

If the levels of the artistic research results are not communicated, the new field will not outlive.

My film *Norén's Drama*, for example, cannot be reduced to an idea. It is not only a film about Norén's work with his drama, but also a film about me working with Norén. A filmmaker is always part of the world he or she portrays. Norén's play is embodied on stage in the same way as the scenes of the rehearsals are embodied in the film. It is an image of an artist that cannot stop.

There is so much more happening in a film than the statements uttered. A face may express more than words. Rhythm may be more important than what is actually said. Even the presence of the artistic researcher affects how the film becomes. For example silences and pauses are precise and central to the breath and tempo of the film.

We will never see and understand what the artist may not have been able to express. A film, though, may communicate levels in this. But the person who believes that it is possible to give an exhaustive depiction of a creative process, I believe puts to high demands on both art and research.

My film is a formation of how both Norén and I struggle with the question of exactness. In the public conversation on film, though, subjects, participants and various ideologies tend to take over on behalf of the formation. Simply put, conversations on film are often not anchored in the subtle language of the filmic expression. And the public discussion on film tends to influence film schools: What to look at, what to go for.

7. Recognize the creative subject

The results within the field of artistic research may look a bit different from within art or science, which is important to see and understand. My result, the text and the film, is an answer to the asymmetry of the new field. The text and the film belong to different traditions,

but are closely linked together in this result. To follow, document, describe, interpret, give form to and analyse different processes and then put them towards each other problematises the controversial and unavoidably difficult concepts as such.

All science is aesthetic and what cannot be translated to anything else is central in artistic research. The creative process as phenomena is escaping us and by trying to articulate the unarticulated we try to show a way for the new field of research. To be able to give form to indirectly, investigate and turn perspectives, a practice is needed. The film director and author Michael Rabiger writes in his standard book *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics*:

"Whatever gets on the screen is the product of choices and relationships, and these unavoidably reflect the director's commitment to what is true, and what needs to be said about those truths." (Rabiger, 1989) The ineffable is an ethical point.

Both parts of my result, the text and the film, is and should be interpreted as closely linked variations of one and the same core for the result to be made clear. It is not rational to tear apart what has never been apart. If you split what is one organism, the comprehension and power of the collected statement is reduced.

My thesis illuminates my film, but also the other way around. A thesis is an aesthetic artefact. It is in the precision of the detail the depth revealed. In this research we use ourselves as instruments and describe the memory of our bodies – ways of remembering, chance and temporary structures that gradually grow in significance and control our processes. It is a sensual registering of thoughts, a way to creativity. The difference between my ambition and what was to become the result is part of the process. From this the power in the thesis grows. Finally, let me put this in a historical context:

As the modern canon arose in the end of the 19th century, art during modernism tried to liberate itself from the demands of rationality and the beliefs in progress within science. Paradoxically by developing more rational methods and create own criteria for progress. Art returned to the origins of creation, a primitive origin, and the description in itself became central. Neither was it immediate, nor was it unreflected. The form experiments of modern art approached the consciousness of science in methodological self-reflection, and the patterns of art were dissolved.

In this field in-between, also I work. The thesis *Inter esse* is a statement saying that art and research is a creative element.