Eighty-seven Questions on

SARN :: Swiss Artistic Research Network
SARN — Swiss Artistic Research Network — is a network of competences that regroups researchers from the seven Swiss Arts Schools. Based on the idea of enriching the debates and practices of artistic research in Switzerland through exchanges, group activities (workshops), publications and symposia, SARN would also like to progressively incorporate points of view from the artistic community in general (artists, institutions, universities, public authorities and foundations in charge of supporting culture) in its reflexions in order to promote the specific contribution of artistic research and enlarge this community in Switzerland and internationally.

This notebook will be launched at the Basel Conference ‘Economies of Aesthetics’ taking place from 18–20 June 2015 at the Academy of Art and Design of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (HGK FHNW) and co-organised with the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA).

It focuses on the dynamics and epistemological impact of the question form: by asking personalities of the art world to share their questions regarding artistic research, SARN wishes to initiate a sustainable reflexion in the rich and booming field that is artistic research.

Anne-Catherine Sutermeister, President of SARN
Eighty-seven Questions on Artistic Research
IN WHICH DIRECTION DOES RESEARCH DIRECT THE ARTIST?
Are we looking for artistic solutions for a chaotic world? Or chaotic solutions for an artistic world?
IS ARTISTIC RESEARCH THE CONTEMPORARY EQUIVALENT OF ALCHEMY?
CAN WE LOOK FORWARD TO A DAY WHEN ARTISTIC RESEARCH DOES NOT HAVE TO JUSTIFY ITS EXISTENCE AS A RECOGNIZED FORM OF RESEARCH PARALLEL TO ACADEMIC RESEARCH?
Since we do not demand of artists that the ‘research’ they do follow the same rules/criteria or accountability as does that of a scientist, historian, or other researcher, should we use the same term — ‘research’ — at all?
WHO IS GOING TO PAY?
Mika Elo, Artist, Professor in Artistic Research University of the Arts Helsinki
DO THE ARTS LOSE THEIR OWN LANGUAGE WHEN THEY TRY TO BE SCIENTIFIC?
WHY SUCH CONCERN ABOUT METHODS?
IS ARTISTIC RESEARCH BECOMING JUST ANOTHER ORGANIZATIONAL CATEGORY?
If there is (or should be) such a thing as ‘artistic research’, can it (or should it) be ‘curated’? If so, what would it mean—how, what for, and by whom?
IS THE THINKING PROCESS PROVOKED BY ARTISTIC RESEARCH THE MAIN RESULT OF THE RESEARCH?
DO ARTISTS BENEFIT FROM THE LABEL ARTISTIC RESEARCH?
Can artistic research be the political consciousness of art?
IS CAPITALISM ILLOGICAL?
If several artistic research projects are in play, how do they play together?
Is scientific research creative? Can it be artistic? What about curatorial research? Is this more scientific, theoretical, practical? Or if on artistic practice — in a way — artistic?
DOES THE EARTH’S ROTATION SLOW DOWN WHEN ALL PEOPLE MAKE A LEAP INTO THE AIR TOWARDS THE EAST AT THE SAME TIME?
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MAKE A DISCOVERY IN ART?
COULD WE DESCRIBE ARTISTIC RESEARCH AS THE STRONG LITTLE SISTER OF PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE?
The most pressing question to debate is whether the experience of art — as opposed to the scientific consciousness — may be a powerful reminder to admit its limitations. To what extent artistic research can establish its characteristic epistemic implications is not merely a question of art, but of the traditional scientific establishment and its inherent ontology.
Are scientists interested in collaborations with artists, or do they rather expect possibilities of creative illustration for scientific results?
IN WHAT WAY DOES ARTISTIC RESEARCH COINCIDE WITH SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH?
WHY DOES RESEARCH BY ARTISTS NEED TO BE ARTISTIC?
Isn't research already artistic in some sense, and the very expression 'artistic research' either redundant, dismissive, or both?
CAN ARTISTIC RESEARCH BE DONE BY NON-ARTISTS?
To what extent should an artist understand the implications of his or her findings? (This question is not my own. It is, perhaps appropriately, taken from a title devised by artist Bojan Sarcevic, who was invited to do an exhibition and instead responded by organizing an event with this question as its topic, bringing in speakers to try to answer the question for him. It remains still to my mind one of the best questions asked by an artist about the role and responsibility of artists in relation to the production of meaning).
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IF ART IS THE TRIUMPH OF CREATIVE UNIQUENESS AND SCIENCE THE TRIUMPH OF STANDARDIZED GENERALIZATION; WHAT THEN IS ARTISTIC RESEARCH? THE TRIUMPH OF UNIQUE GENERALIZATION OR THE TRIUMPH OF STANDARDIZED CREATIVITY?
Doctorates do not guarantee better chances for getting academic jobs. In earlier days PhD students could at least get jobs as assistants: this has widely been eliminated nowadays for there are not enough opportunities with regard to the number of applicants. The situation is precarious without perspectives in the artistic-scientific research field. Does a doctorate lead to a professional occupation at all; or is it merely a status symbol for privileged milieus?
Is society and its new elements closer to the arts than 20 years ago? Are the main triggers in artistic research natural sciences and technologies—or rather popular online culture?
Why does every artist, who reads a book once in a while, think s/he is doing research?
Does art have to be research today? Is art really more explorative now than 100 years ago, when nobody called it research? Or is this just another language regime? Or an ingratiation to scientific criteria? Or pure bumbledom?
IS ANARCHY THE HIGHEST FORM OF ORDER (ELISEE RECLUS)?
WHOEVER READS ALL THOSE PAPERS SWALLOWED BY THE DIGITAL MOUTH OF INSTITUTIONS?
WILL I HAVE TO SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE?
IS MY ARTWORK SPEAKING TO ME, AND IF SO, IN WHICH LANGUAGE?
IS MY MEANING WRONG, OR IS IT JUST MY GRAMMAR?
Why do we have to talk in English when we talk about artistic research?
WHAT ARE ADEQUATE FORUMS TO DEBATE AND PRESENT ARTISTIC RESEARCH? DO WE NEED NEW ARENAS OR SHOULD WE RATHER FOCUS ON EXISTING ONES? WHO IS /SHOULD BE ADDRESSED?
DO WE NEED MORE AND MORE EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE TO WORK IN THE ART FIELD?
How can the unknown be discovered in the well known? Or: how could we look at the familiar from another perspective?
WHAT HAPPENS IF AN ARTIST DOES RESEARCH ON ANOTHER ARTIST? (AS BETHAN HUWS DID RECENTLY ON MARCEL DUCHAMP?) IS THIS ARTISTIC RESEARCH, ART HISTORY, ART THEORY, ART PHILOSOPHY "="?
What's next?
IS ARTISTIC RESEARCH A SIGN OF CONTEMPORANEOUSNESS?

Damian Christinger, Gallery owner, Zurich
How can knowledge produced in artistic research be related to and enrich scientific knowledge production (and vice versa) in a way that both art and science are equally involved and addressed?
HOW CAN PRACTICE-BASED ARTISTIC RESEARCH KEEP ITS AUTONOMY AS A FORM OF AESTHETIC THINKING IN AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAME? OR IN OTHER WORDS: HOW CAN ACADEMIZATION BE PREVENTED?
SCIENTIFIC JARGON AND METHODOLOGY ENTANGLES WITH ART IN COLLABORATIONS WHICH CAUSES ART TO DERIVE FROM ARTISTIC FORM. WHAT CAN ART EXPECT FROM SCIENCE IN CONTENT AND FORM? CAN ARTISTIC FORMATS PLAY A MORE IMPORTANT ROLE IN SCIENCE? AREN’T THE EXPECTATIONS OF CREATIVITY AND DISLIM- ITATION RATHER A PROJECTION ORIGINATING FROM CREATIVITY TECHNIQUES?
Is artistic research a good auxiliary income?
CAN ARTISTIC RESEARCH BE POLITICAL?
Will artistic research be able to loosen up and find its way back to inventive perception?
DO WE NEED A THIRD FIELD IN WHICH NEITHER ART NOR SCIENCE ARE AT HOME — WHERE THE TWO DISCIPLINES COULD DEVELOP SOMETHING NEW TOGETHER?
CAN WE FUNCTION IN THE ARTS IF WE ARE NOT SPENDING MORE TIME OUTSIDE THE ARTS (GAMING, VIDEO-CLIPPING, CONGRESSES FOR NEUROSCIENCES AND SIMILAR EVENTS)?
HOW DOES PERCEPTION AND THINKING CHANGE IF SPACE IS CONCEIVED AS MEMORY?
HOW DISTANT SHOULD I FEEL TOWARDS MY WORK?
HOW CAN WE BE COMPLICIT WITH MATERIALS?
MONOPOLY CASH NOTES TO CREDIT MY IDEA INCUBATOR?
ANY PRACTICAL TIPS ON HOW TO TURN MY RESEARCH RESULTS INTO VALUABLE PIECES OF CONTEMPORARY ART?
As ever, it is very confusing for funding organizations to approach works that combine scholarship and creative methods. Many of my works and my students’ works are too creative for scholarly support and too scholarly for creative support. Each thinks the other should be doing the funding. Couldn’t this be improved by better definitions of what visual research and creative research projects are, from leading institutions in both scholarship and arts? And couldn’t co-funding be targeted across organizations to promote some awards that are explicitly hybrid (and/or support collective, interdisciplinary work)?
WHERE ARE THE LIMITS OF WORDS AND IMAGES? HOW COULD THEY COMPLETE OR SUBSTITUTE EACH OTHER?
HOW DOES ARTISTIC RESEARCH RELATE TO "SCIENTIFIC" RESEARCH IN ART?
CAN WE CHANGE THE CONVERSATION ABOUT BOTH ART AND RESEARCH BY UNCONDITIONALLY WORKING FOR A RETURN TO OPEN KNOWLEDGE, PRAXIS, POETICS AND THE EMPIRICAL?
DO WE NEED NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY FORMS AND FORMATS TO ASSESS AND CRITIQUE THE OUTCOMES OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH? WHO IS ENTITLED TO EVALUATE ARTISTIC RESEARCH PROJECTS AND PROPOSALS?
HOW MUCH THINKING AND SEARCHING CONTRIBUTES TO GOOD ART?
How can we find the expertise for evaluating projects that are not located in the traditional artistic disciplines—or in the codes of academic research?

Marianne Burki, Head of Visual Arts Pro Helvetia, Zurich
DO I NEED TO KNEAD MY ARCHIVE NOW?
WILL I LOSE MY PRACTICE?
WHAT DOES THE ‘END OF PRACTICE’ MEAN?
SHOULD IT [THE ARTWORK] BE UNDERSTOOD, OR RATHER PRODUC-TIVELY MISUNDERSTOOD?
WHERE IS THE LINE BETWEEN ARTISTIC ‘RESEARCH’ (IN WHAT IS OFTEN CALLED AN ARTIST’S ‘RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICE’) AND SIMPLY, BEING AN ARTIST, PERIOD: WHICH IS TO SAY, BEING SOMEONE WHO LOOKS CLOSELY AT, IS INQUISTIVE ABOUT, AND ULTIMATELY REFLECTS ON HISTORY AND THE WORLD AROUND HIM OR HER?
WHAT IS THE PERSPECTIVE OF SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING AND WHAT IS THE PERSPECTIVE OF ARTISTIC UNDERSTANDING? WHICH ARE EACH OTHER’S INTERESTS?
The lack of a basic education in scientific methodology for PhD students may cause frustration and demotivation on both sides, for professors and for students. What could be done to ensure better preconditions?
Current scholarly models based on monograph production and solo work are not particularly useful for many digital projects that require artists and scholars to work together. Arts and humanities institutions have a lot of trouble giving tenure credit and funding to multi-author work. The teaching schedule, in the US context, is also not so well set up for this, though some European systems are better. Wouldn’t laboratory approaches such as in science and short teaching modules, and teach-research-module periods, better suit the arts and humanities, rather than semesters and summers?
Is a self-employed artist more responsible for his works than an employed researcher for his findings?
WHAT KIND OF DISCOURSE IS BOTH, INTRINSIC TO INDIVIDUAL ART RESEARCH PRACTICES AND COMPREHENSIBLE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LARGER RESEARCH COMMUNITY?
How do different salaries influence the status of the involved researchers?
LONGER SOLO RESIDENCIES FOR TRADITIONAL ARTISTS AND WRITERS ARE ALSO NOT NECESSARILY THE BEST MODEL FOR FUNDING CREATIVE RESEARCH. WOULDN'T AN INTENSIVE MONTH WITH DEDICATED TECHNICAL SUPPORT, FOLLOWED BY SOLO TIME WHEN ARTISTS AND RESEARCHERS DEVELOP THE PROJECT; THEN A FOLLOW-UP MONTH TO ADVANCE OR FINALIZE THE WORK BE MUCH MORE ECONOMICALLY Viable AND USEFUL?
CAN ARTISTIC RESEARCH BE FUNNY?

Marianne Halter, Artist, Zurich
IF FORM IS BORN OF THE FORM-
DESIRE OF KNOWLEDGE, WHAT
THEN COULD RESEARCH BE WHEN
MADE FOR THE SAKE OF THE
FORMING OF THE FORM ONLY?
DOES THE TERM ARTISTIC RESEARCH KEEP THE BALL IN THE COURT OF THE INSTITUTIONS?
Are there any secret agents around?

Claudia Mareis, Designer, cultural scientist, Head ixdm HGK FHNW
WHICH ROLE DOES THE MATERIALITY OF THE RECORD PLAY IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS?
Is the immaterial artwork the nucleus of artistic research?
IN WHAT WAY CAN THE MEANING OF ART BE RECONFIGURED IN ARTISTIC RESEARCH?
Does knowledge originating from the collaboration of diverse artistic research projects have a specific form or specific qualities?
WHEN DOES QUESTIONING TURN INTO RESEARCH? WHEN DOES SEARCHING TURN INTO RESEARCH?
HOW TO PRACTICE THE ART OF EXACTITUDE?
WHAT DOES THE ARTWORK WANT?

Mika Elo, Artist, Professor in Artistic Research, University of the Arts Helsinki
Eighty-seven questions on artistic research

After more than ten years of experience with research at art schools in Switzerland – and internationally since the beginning of the 1990s – scholarly statements and visions about the future development of artistic research have become well known. SARN’s aim is to investigate the impact of artistic research with a focus on non-school protagonists in Switzerland and abroad – by collecting questions.

In a first step, and inspired by the book by artists Fischli/Weiss, *Findet mich das Glück?*, we looked for questions – straightforward, multi-layered, enigmatic, inspiring – presenting the personal experiences of artists, curators, researchers, and observers of the field or representatives of a funding organisation.

The present notebook includes 87 multi-faceted questions and is the starting point of a long-term project dealing with the impact or ‘added value’ of artistic research in society. We invite you to step into the flow of questions in order to enable a deepened reflection. By accepting the current ambivalent situation in which there might be no (simple) answers, we would like to keep the discussion going.

In a second step, after the conference, SARN will continue the project by including various points-of-view. The space left in the notebook is provided for you to sketch your thoughts. You are very welcome to send further questions, remarks and answers to SARN under the following address: camille.dumond@hesge.ch.

Get inspired!

Flavia Caviezel & Markus Schwander,
Members of the SARN board, June 2015
Flavia Caviezel – Ethnologist/vidéaste, senior researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Experimental Design and Media Cultures, Academy of Art and Design at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland.

Markus Schwander – Artist, senior researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Art and Design Education, Academy of Art and Design at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland.

Anne-Catherine Sutermeister – Head of research and lecturer at HEAD – University of Art and Design Geneva at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland HES SO, and consultant in cultural policies.

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