

# Introduction – Teaching Artistic Strategies

## Playing with Materiality, Aesthetics and Ambiguity

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*Introduction by Fatma Kargin, Dorothée King, Selena Savić*

The strategic development of artistic research, art education research, research creation, and practice-based research in art and design suggests that art and design can offer innovative modes of knowledge practices, with a focus on a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice. Numerous publications from the UK, The Netherlands, and the Nordic Countries have been debating legitimacy, specificity, strength, and weaknesses of research in these contexts since the 1990s, steered by the Bologna educational reform in Europe.<sup>1</sup> While teaching is an important aspect of academic training and experience, the transfer of doctoral research into teaching has not been extensively discussed. And yet, it is precisely in the moment of transfer to teaching that academic knowledge coming out of art- and design-based research contributes to public knowledge and to the institutional grounding of these practices. This is an important step to ensure the transfer of the research to the public, and to contribute back to the field.

In May 2022, a four-day symposium *Teaching Artistic Strategies* for research and teaching in arts and design institutions was held at the University for Arts and Design in Basel, Switzerland. The intense conference on practice and theory transfers in diverse research projects on PhD and post-PhD levels was held as a joint event of the Institutes for Arts and Design Education (IADE) and Institute Experimental Design and Media Cultures (IXDM). The organizers were in a positive way overwhelmed by the approval and thus the apparent need for young researchers to ex-

change information on the methods and reasons for the transfer of artistic, design-based and art education research into teaching contexts.

This interest is quite understandable when we look at the short history of putting artistic strategies, academic research, and pedagogy in the same box of interest. Artistic research developed as a way to follow the Bologna protocol of the BA, MA, and PhD trajectory to secure comparable attention and funding to the humanities or natural sciences. Artistic and design-oriented researchers always seemed to suffer from an inferiority or a form of comparison complex regarding the traditional academic disciplines. After two decades of borrowing research methods from other disciplines and mixing them with artistic and design-led approaches, current researchers are understandably still sometimes confused by the big buffet of possibilities on how to apply their diverse perspectives on knowledge production methods. More questions on how to transform or infuse arts and design practices with science and transfer knowledge into teaching arose than could be answered. Daring to invent your own modes of speculation might be the only possible artistic way, but it still needs to be justified in an academic context.<sup>2</sup> The speculation about and transformation of possible methods continues. As the Godfather of artistic research Julian Klein said: "The proximity to scientific strategies and practices lies in the "not-yet-knowing."<sup>3</sup>

Art Education stands at a turn. Making a link to the adventuring method of French philosopher Jacques Rancière, the square between artwork, art educational method, educator, and audience is increasingly dissolving in favour of diverse, situational, and spontaneous processes of engagement.<sup>4</sup> The contributions to the Basel symposium reflect on those multiple angles approaches to art education may take nowadays.

With this book we intended to initiate a different trend of 'knowing.' Our intent is to share our knowledges, and to make teaching approaches accessible and discussable. We want to foster feelings of being less lost. We aim to activate a new generation and community of researchers who care for one another, but also care for the different subject matters circling towards inclusion rather than trying to find the correct new terms for their research.

The symposium *Teaching Artistic Strategies* showcased outstanding approaches to pedagogy that problematized the transfer of research into teaching. It initiated a systematic exchange between junior researchers and established scholars in the field. The program included keynote lectures by Elke Krasny, Glenn Loughran and Irene Posch, along with twelve workshops and presentations by doctoral candidates and junior scholars. Some of these presentations were the basis for contributions we present in this book.

The main questions participants of the symposium raised were aimed at the contribution to epistemology in the arts and inclusive contemporary pedagogical methods through diverse media settings. We proposed to focus on this challenge through experimental approaches characteristic of the research practices of the participants. With this volume we allow ourselves a renewed transfer of knowledge. By showcasing different approaches to pedagogy and problematizing the transfer of research into teaching, this volume aims to contribute to long-term prospects and sustainability of practice-based and education-oriented research in art and design institutions. The main question we posed ourselves is how can innovative research questions on and around art-, design-, and media-relevant topics be transferred into teaching as well as into new discussion-initiating textual forms?

The stimulating contributions by the international researchers in this publication all deal with diverse knowledge discourses, media diversity, and innovative methodic-methodological transfers. Contributions are short enough to make a point, yet long enough to give a glimpse into the variety of ways artistic and design can index knowledge practices. While bringing significant impulses to artistic and art education research-and-teaching settings, the diversity of the contributions simultaneously showcases the potential of multi- and trans-perspectivity in both discourses. The question of the artistic is conceived differently in the individual contributions. The concepts and views of materiality and aesthetics addressed by the authors complement, challenge, and enrich each other by highlighting their wide-ranging contextualization in each contribution. Specifically, the issue of ambiguity as the third focus of this edition strikes us here – as it should – in manifold ways. We see

the productive potential of ambiguity in the diverse points of access and approaches to art pedagogy/education and to artistic research. What seems to be ambiguous in the sense of *Mehrdeutig* are the meanings ascribed to materiality and aesthetics. One step further, we identify another level of ambiguity in the sense of *Mehrdeutig / Zweideutig*, which manifests itself in the methodic-methodological considerations. In a closer look, finally, we encounter another layer of ambiguity in the sense of *Ambig* entangled in the moments, spaces and settings of teaching and learning conceptualized by the authors. While, for instance, Kargin suggests in her article that the *spaces between* are ambiguous, Hahn relies on ambiguity with the premise that the entities only emerge from the process of *intra-action*. While a certain categorization between the contributions seems to be redundant, as they position themselves specifically and strategically at the intersection of entangled discourses, the topics and the focus of the research can be divided into two central themes: **Arts Education** and **Artistic Research**.

Pedagogy in arts and design contexts is a mysterious field. Often the so-called true fine arts and design disciplines look down on the pedagogy departments. Pedagogy might be mocked or even ironically ignored in arts and design schools as a space where ideas and experience of doing art gets rationalized so that it can be effectively shared. Granted, participatory learning processes are strenuous, hurtful, and confrontational – but also rewarding. Knowledge transfer and learning how to produce and spread knowledge might be the most sustainable artistic practice there is. The articles in this edition focusing on **Art Education** revolve around events, whereas the understanding of the event spans from its explicit views as in the ‘event-based learning in artistic research processes’ to the ‘learning as an event itself’ with a phenomenological approach. In a more subtle way, we come across an event in the form of a shift as in the case of ‘horizontal writing’ and encounter it again in its temporally extended nature in the form of an ‘observation of one’s own situatedness and placement within diverse human-thing constellations.’ Situated within the discourse of archipelagic thinking, phenomenology, performativity, epistemology and neo-materialist approaches, the articles ask for spacious mindsets and different approaches to epistemology

through artistic, empirical and theory-based research methods revolving around aesthetics, ambiguity and materiality.

In individual contributions, art pedagogy and artistic research become tools of reflection through opening up to possibilities of responding to as well as designing the urgencies of our moment. Artistic research shall be understood as a transitory process of societal creativity, of imaginary agency, and cyclic modes of design. Importance is enhanced in questions of ownership, new forms of documentation, and anticipating future forms of knowledge.

**Fatma Kargin** raises in her chapter **Spontaneity and the Spaces Between** the question about spatial, time-related, and educational localization of learning in the museum, based on her ongoing empirical research on the modes of spectatorship and aesthetic experience. Kargin negotiates the intersections of performative spaces, learning, *Bildung*, spontaneity, and responsive phenomenology. She identifies such spaces as performative and therefore transitory and constantly mutating, coming up with the thesis that learning shall be considered as an event.

In his chapter **Glenn Loughran** explores **ARCHIPELAGOY – Un-islanding Artistic Research and Its Education** how the concept of the archipelago and archipelagic thinking can be used as a theoretical framework to support event-based artistic research processes. Loughran offers an original account of teaching experiences that stem out of a research project *What is an Island* which he led between 2018 and 2021 on Sherkin Island, Ireland. Highly relevant to the volume, this contribution connects anti-colonial philosophy and theory with art pedagogy in meaningful and insightful ways. Loughran looks into methods for translating those thinking processes into pedagogies of care and attention. The desire to 'un-island' knowledges and artistic practices demands new open communities ready for transdisciplinary experimental actions.

**Lennart Krauss'** chapter **Writing Horizontally – What Teaching, Artistic Research and Epistemology Might Have in Common** asks for shifts in research, epistemology, and education through new ways of integrating essayistic writing into educational artistic settings. Krauss' take on teaching as trying things out puts a special focus on the mean-

ing and methods of working with writing, namely the format of the essay. This argument, partly rooted in etymology, is explored historically and practically. Krauss aims to turn a vertical learning process into a horizontal one by twisting authorship through the implementation of interstices and transgressions with switching modes of “thinking of” and “thinking about” to “thinking with” and “thinking through”.

In her chapter **Researching and Reshaping Human-thing Constellations – Neo-material Thinking as a Principle for Teaching in the Arts**, **Annemarie Hahn** proposes an art educational teaching sequence in which the idea is to observe one's own placement within different human-human and human-thing constellations in order to better understand how we act and interact, include, and exclude. Relying on new materialist theory and object-oriented ontology, Hahn documents a teaching scenario which explored participants' understanding and experience of inclusion in the context of the digital. She not only considers the conditions of human actors but also pays attention to material and spatial and media-related conditions that determine collective agency. The chapter thus addresses a very timely question, namely the relation between digital culture and inclusion.

**Elsa Gomis'** chapter **Imagining New Ways of Representing Refugees** explores ways to bring awareness to the influence of the dominant Western media gaze on migration and refugee crises. In her teaching materials and the participatory pedagogical setting, Gomis carefully works to deconstruct the politically charged representation of migration in mainstream media through different artistic practices such as sketching, drawing and mapping. She uses those newly created images as a starting point to seek alternative means to visually portray contemporary migrants to challenge today's 'aesthetic of the we'.

**Vanessa Graf**'s chapter **Dichotomous Keys as a Way of Seeing: Teaching Botany Out of Context and Other Ways of Questioning the Artistic in Artistic Research Strategies** discusses how to bring together artistic and *artistic-scientific research*. Graf analyses the scientific method of ID-keying used in biology and botany as a practice that could be transformed in an art-related educational setting. Graf's intention is to blur disciplinary boundaries and methodical divides, to enable a mean-

ingful contribution to a wider scientific discussion on how knowledge is constituted, created, and established.

Thomas Laval's chapter **Opuntia's Ubiquity: Learning Situatedness from Artists** analyses situatedness of knowledge comparing the ways in which two contemporary artists, Fareed Armaly and Mariana Castillo Deball, work with the same plant: the opuntia. In each artistic project, this cactus is discussed as a representation of a specific geographical and cultural territory. The question Thomas Laval is aiming for in his pedagogical approach is how to invite a terrestrial plant into the artistic practice without being confined to a utilitarian role.

In her chapter **Teaching More-than-human Invitation in Artistic Research and Pedagogy**, Selena Savić addresses three examples (imaginary of Plato's symposium, Joseph Beuys' performance How to explain pictures to a dead hare, a fishing wharf off the Atlantic coast of Canada) to ask questions of inclusion, authorship, environmental destruction, and human-centeredness with methods of posthumanism and feminist new materialism. Her focus is on notions of invitations and hospitality with the goal to find more inclusive forms of artistic pedagogy.

The contributions to *Teaching Artistic Strategies: Playing with Materiality, Aesthetics and Ambiguity* engage our readers into a variety of epistemological experiments with the aim to divide the borders between perception and production of arts and media. The diversity of contributions is a strength of this volume as it demonstrates the inexhaustive plurality and space of coexistence for the approaches taken by the authors.

With this compilation we hope to strengthen new communities of educators and researchers in arts and design, whose practices are built on the concept of care as empathetic knowledge production. We seek to contribute to new modes of phenomenological adventures in art-led research and didactics. The collection opens a space for discourse on art pedagogy, artistic research and practice-based research in art and design which hopes to contribute to broader concerns in higher education institutions.

## Notes

- 1 Without compiling a comprehensive list of books, the following will offer an overview: Christopher Frayling, *Research in Art and Design* (London: Royal College of Art, 1993); Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices* (Helsinki: Gothenburg, Sweden: Academy of Fine Arts; University of Gothenburg/Art Monitor, 2005); Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, eds., *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, Paperback ed (London: Tauris, 2010); Henk Borgdorff, *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, 2012); Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford, eds., *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social, Culture, Economy, and the Social* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012).
- 2 Tröndle, Martin & Warmers, Julia: *Artistic research as aesthetic science. Contributions to a transdisciplinary hybridization of science and art*; Bielefeld. 2012
- 3 Klein, Julia: "Was ist künstlerische Forschung?" In: *kunsttexte.de/ Auditive Perspektiven*, No. 2., 2011.
- 4 Jacques Rancière: "The Emancipated Spectator". In: *Artforum*. Vol. 45, 2007, edition 7, pp. 271–281, 279.