

# artistic research does #2

The publishing of first essay of the series *Artistic Research Does* brought us to a state of drooling joy. The acute remarks and observations made by Annette Arlander in that essay were instrumental to set our dear project in motion.

With the new academic season *Artistic Research Does* proudly presents a new contribution for the debate about Artistic Research, by sharing the inaugural lecture held by Janneke Wesseling (Professor of the recently installed Chair of Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Leiden, Academy of Creative and Performing Arts). The lecture is as recent as September 2016.

Starting with a tautological “Artistic research is research carried out by artists”, this #2 sets a fundamental condition to the academic understanding of artistic research, while at the same time somehow setting the tone for the unfolding text. Janneke Wesseling undertook a passage through some of the evidences and common-places that have lately conditioned and characterized artistic research, going through “methodology”, “ontology” and “knowledge”, in order to offer a more elaborated view stressing the

reflective dimension the artists' practices ought to comprise. A complex notion of "experience" crosses Wesseling's understanding, which she draws as basis to think the pivotal intertwinement of theory and practice, of work of art and language, that artistic research has to definitely envisage for its own interest.

Since Janneke Wesseling's visit to the Faculty of Fine Arts in Porto two years ago, we have been in contact and following attentively the developments within the PhDArts programme she directs. The PhDArts programme (mostly based at KABK – Royal Academy of Art/The Hague) is, without doubt, one of the leading clusters of artistic research in Europe today.

For all this it is with great joy and gratitude that we have Janneke Wesseling with us again.

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# Of Sponge, Stone and the Intertwinement with the Here and Now

## A Methodology of Artistic Research

This text is the slightly expanded version of the Inaugural lecture to the Chair of Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts, Leiden University, Faculty of Humanities, Academy of Creative and Performing Arts.

— Janneke Wesseling

The lecture was held by Janneke Wesseling on 19 September 2016 at Leiden University.

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# Introduction

<sup>1</sup>\_docARTES is also a collaboration with the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Belgium.

Before embarking on a more personal account of artistic research and its methodology, a few words need to be said on the newly established chair to which I was appointed on February 1, 2016. The chair bears the title *Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts* and is located at PhDArts, doctoral programme in visual art and design. PhDArts is part of the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts (ACPA). ACPA was founded in 2001, as a collaboration between Leiden University and the University of the Arts in The Hague. ACPA first started a doctoral programme in music, called docARTES, in 2003.<sup>1</sup> Five years later PhDArts started off, established by ACPA director Frans de Ruiter and myself. Today, ACPA comprises roughly seventy PhD candidates, about twenty of whom are enrolled in the PhDArts programme. Besides the chair *Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts*, two more new chairs have simultaneously been installed: *Theory of Research in the Arts* (taken up by my colleague Henk Borgdorff) and *Auditive Culture* (taken up by my colleague Marcel Cobussen).

It is my task to contribute to the development of the practice and theory of research in the visual arts and the positioning of this relatively new research domain within the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University, as well as in the field of art nationally and internationally. I am responsible for both the supervision of PhD candidates in the visual arts and design, and for the further development of PhDArts and its

taught programme. My task also entails developing courses related to artistic research on BA and MA levels for students from both Leiden and The Hague, and serving as a bridge between Leiden University and the University of the Arts.

Fundamental to artistic research is the exchange between practice and theory, between making and thinking, or between ‘the physical and the mental’, to borrow the phraseology of Alfred North Whitehead, to whom I will frequently return in the course of this lecture. The briefest definition of artistic research might read: ‘Artistic research is research carried out by artists.’ To a certain extent, this definition is a tautology and it may therefore sound rather self-evident, but — judging from the applications we receive for our programmes — it is not. The claim of this definition is that *only* artists (visual artists, designers, musicians, choreographers, in short any type of artist) can execute artistic research. Not art historians, not curators, not theorists from the field of cultural studies, nor any other kind of theorist. Artistic research distinguishes itself from art history by the pivotal role art practice has in the research. Whereas art historians do research *into* art made by others, artistic research is research *in and through* art by the artist him- or herself.

In artistic research, the research question issues directly from the practice of the artist-researcher, the research methods are characterized by putting the practice into action during the research process; and furthermore, the results of the research contribute to both art practice and artistic-academic discourse. At ACPA (Academy of Creative and Performing Arts) the emphasis on the role of art practice in artistic research is regarded as crucial and as an essential aspect of our international profile.

The tautology inherent to the definition ‘Artistic research is research carried out by artists’, however, is not entirely satisfying. Therefore I propose the following, more elaborate definition: ‘Artistic research is the critical and theoretically positioned reflection by the artist on her practice and on the world, in art and in the written text.’ This is to say that the reflection finds

expression in the interconnection of art work and discursive writing. In its emphasis on critical reflexivity, this definition elucidates the fact that artistic research is at home in the Faculty of the Humanities. Critical reflection of the research methods used and the theoretical contextualization of one's position is what all disciplines in the humanities have in common.



# Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts

My decision, at 18 years of age, to study the history of art was inspired by a fascination for the materiality of things. It was a desire to connect with the tactile world in a very concrete sense. I also wanted to gain insight into how it is that objects and experiences can carry meaning for us. I searched for an acquaintance with the things around me that was more intimate than provided by the linguistic abstractions that I had been raised with. An intellectual and religious upbringing had, on the one hand, generated an inquisitive attitude and the eagerness to learn, but on the other hand it had created a distance to the world out there, a disconnection, an estrangement from the material nature of things. It was like looking at the world through a glass wall. I felt intuitively that visual art could show me a way out and that artists have a specific kind of understanding or perception of reality that could help to connect, to relate to this world.

Of course, at the time I was not able to express or even to understand this motivation to study art history, it was only the vaguest of intuitions. It has however proved to be correct (as intuitions usually do). Over the years, art as a meaningful way to connect to the world has only gained in importance for me. The interaction between art work and spectator demonstrates, or performs, the world as being 'not merely physical, nor merely mental'. These are the words of Whitehead, the mathematician who turned to the philosophy of science and metaphysics in the later part of his life. One of Whitehead's main themes was 'the

general continuity between human experience and physical occasions'. He states: "Wherever a vicious dualism [between physical and mental, JW] appears, it is by reason of mistaking an abstraction for a final concrete fact" (Whitehead 2014, 18, 19).

<sup>2</sup>\_I have been writing as an art critic for this Dutch daily newspaper since 1982 until the present.

The experience of art — of any kind of art, not just visual art — takes place in the here and now, in real life, in the time span of the active engagement of a spectator with the work.<sup>2</sup> That is why in this lecture I will not show reproductions of art works, which would only serve to illustrate my argument. Insofar as art is present today, it is performance art.

After the completion of the degree in art history, I embarked on a continuing dialogue with art works, through my art critical writing for *NRC Handelsblad*, as well as my dialogue with artists. This is how I learned most of what I understand about art. Artists' writings (historical and contemporary) and conversations with them continue to play an important part in this even today. For me, the appointment as Professor in Artistic Research is the outcome of this process. It is a great privilege to be able to continue the exchange with artists in the framework of the PhDArts programme.

Artists have always — 'always', that is, within the framework of Western art history, meaning since the early Renaissance — done research and have always been part of scholarly discourse. The distinction between art practice and the sciences was non-existent until the nineteenth century. But the history of how the two became separated, however interesting, is not the topic of today.

The phenomenon of artistic research, as I have just described, is not quite as new as is sometimes assumed. It has its origins in early Modernism, at a time when traditional values in art were radically criticized and abandoned. With Modernism, the 'right' and generally accepted criteria for art practice lost their meaning and finally disappeared (despite the fact, of course, that decrees on what is or is not 'true art' were put out by dogmatic

artists and art theorists up until the seventies). As the British painter Bridget Riley (1931) recently put it, referring to the early days of Modernism:

“Method was surely relevant, but in what capacity? (...) Artists found that they could no longer expect – or be expected – to communicate through a commonly agreed imagery; alternative routes had to be discovered. The experiences and responsibilities of the individual had become important in ways that they had never been before” (Riley 2004, 172). And elsewhere she concludes: “It became clear that one’s first task as an artist is simply: to create a way of working, to discover “doing” and to establish the terms upon which a creative dialogue could be sustained” (Riley 2007, 66). To create a way of working, discover ‘doing’ and establish the terms for a sustainable creative dialogue: this would do very well as a definition of ‘artistic research’. As does the terse statement by John Baldessari, an American conceptual artist and exact contemporary of Riley: ‘Doing art is questioning how to do it.’

Artists embark on PhD research because they want to gain a better understanding of the experiences and responsibilities of the individual, in the phrasing of Riley, and to get a grip on ‘the terms for a sustainable creative dialogue’. The artist as researcher, apart from producing art, must engage in discourse (be it artistic, social, political, philosophic), and take it upon her - or himself to clarify the discourse of which the artist is a part by producing artistic work. And even though artists have always done research, the systematic and consistent manner in which present-day artists-as-researchers aim to advance their practice and to uncover the presuppositions underlying this practice, is new.

As an example, I will briefly describe a finished PhDArts research project. Bear in mind that research projects in this programme are highly individual and very different in character. Most of these artists would never have come across one another if it were not for this programme. The diversity of the projects proves to be an enrichment of the dialogue that they are engaged in and of the research environment resulting from this dialogue.

Ruchama Noorda finished her PhD research project, entitled *ReForm*, in 2015. Noorda's aim was, in her own words (and I will quote from her dissertation), to determine how and in what ways 'Lebensreform' philosophy and practice has shaped her ideology, commitments, personal aesthetic and art practice. The dissertation consists of an analysis of the social, ideological and spiritual underpinnings of the Lebensreform movement, tracing the connections and continuities between Lebensreform and pre-modern and post-modern forms of Utopian thinking. One of her conclusions is that she is a *para*-conceptual artist, believing that works come into being between lines of thought, theories, dreams, actions and whatever materials she chooses to employ.

A series of art works made by Noorda as the practical-experimental part of the *ReForm* project, was presented alongside the discursive outcomes of the research. The two elements, work and text, form, according to her, 'a hybrid theory-practice test site', a place where the materials, beliefs and practices most commonly associated with the historical Lebensreform movement are held up for critical examination.

In writing the text, Noorda's intention was threefold: to extend and elaborate on the strategies and techniques adopted in the making of the art works, to reflect upon the implications and the sources of those strategies and techniques in the Lebensreform movement, and to draw out what, for her, are the key issues embedded in the project of Life Reform.

During the research period, which lasted some five years, Noorda discovered she felt increasingly drawn to the substance of *mud*, feeling that it might somehow provide a key to 'where she comes from as a person and artist'. She realized that all the art works coming out of the *ReForm* project can in one way or another be seen as attempts to redeem the dirt from which modern life has tried to insulate us, attempting to literally think through and complicate an already complex and murky heritage, to work through mud as a medium, which can function as both a poison and a cure.

In other words, in digging into the history of the Lebensreform movement, Noorda also gained insight into the fundamentals of her own commitments, her personal aesthetic and art practice.



# A Methodology of Artistic Research: The Notion of ‘Experience’

Methodology is one of the three most misused and trivialized terms in the emerging field of artistic research. The other two are ‘ontology’ and ‘knowledge’, that is, ‘knowledge’ in conjunction with ‘production’, as in ‘knowledge production’. The popularity of these concepts stems from a misplaced effort to lend academic weight to artistic research. The term ‘ontological’, that one very frequently comes across during conferences on artistic research, usually simply denotes ‘important’. As for ‘knowledge’: I will return to the issue of ‘knowledge’ in relation to art practice in the latter part of this lecture. Concerning ‘methodology’: generally, for example in presentations of research projects, ‘methodology’ does not refer so much to a ‘knowledge of methods’ (which is what the term literally implies), but merely to a specific ‘method’ or ‘approach’ that is used to tackle a particular problem, for example an art project commissioned in public space.

Of course that is not to say that the development of a methodology of artistic research is not of great importance. Such a methodology presupposes an acquaintance with a diversity of research methods (including the assessment of their origins and histories) and the reasoned choice and consistent application of a particular approach. I regard it as one of the vital tasks of ACPA to take responsibility for a precise use of concepts and for the development of a solid and coherent methodology of artistic research.

Methodology as the reasoned and systematic implication of a set of concepts as well as methodological debate are essential to

the advancement of any research field. In the case of artistic research, this means that concepts such as creativity, performance, political engagement, expression, sensory perception, visibility (to name just a few) will have to be problematized and thought through in a consistent manner. What is needed is the development of a conceptual apparatus specific to the interrelation of making and thinking, which are the fundament of artistic research.

Over the past fifteen years or so, a lot of work has been done in this respect. It is not surprising that during these years the theoretical framework of artistic research, as a young field establishing itself as a scholarly discipline and therefore seeking academic legitimization, has been largely informed by existing academic methodologies, mainly deriving from the humanities. These conventional methodological criteria in the humanities can be summarized as offering an interpretation of the current state of affairs in a certain field, articulating a question or problem, presenting an analysis, and making a coherent argument that proposes an answer to the posed question and thereby offering a new contribution to the field of knowledge. Even though these criteria have their relevance for artistic research in a very general sense, artistic research now has to develop on the basis of its own merits and its own particular sets of questions.

The next logical step in the development of artistic research as a field of study is the critical reflection on its specific and inherent characteristics, the in-depth consideration of its particular profile, and of the aims of artistic research as a type of research that is grounded in artistic practice. A lot of work is to be done to gain insight into the nature of the interrelation of art practice and theoretic discourse.

As a step in this direction, I will expand on the concept of 'experience', as a notion that emphasizes the experiential nature of both art practice and artistic research. Experience is etymologically related to 'experiment', from the Latin *experientia* (from the verb *perior*, which means to try, to attempt), which in its turn derives from the Greek verb *peirao* (to try,

attempt, test, get experience). Experience therefore has (at least) two meanings. One is related to the past, as a competence which is required in the course of time. This competence may equally be practical or technical, as well as intellectual or psychological. The other meaning refers to the lived presence in ‘real time’. In this sense, ‘experience’ is synonymous to ‘event’. These two meanings of experience, although different, are closely related. An experience in the here and now may relate to a similar experience in the past, which enables the recognition of a particular experience as such in the present.

Any methodology of artistic research should, I believe, take sensory perception and ‘bodily thinking’ into account as a defining characteristic. Artistic practice, no matter how conceptualized or politicized it may be, is rooted in a sensory understanding of or perspective on reality, or takes sensory perception as point of departure. The term ‘experience’ implicates this interlacing of intellectual discourse with the sensory world.

A genealogy of the notion of experience can be traced in the thinking of William James (1842–1910), John Dewey (1859–1952), Whitehead (1861–1947) and Brian Massumi (1956), consecutively, all philosophers belonging to the empiricist tradition. Massumi proposes to group these philosophers (and others, among whom Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze) together under the denominator of ‘process philosophy’, a term Massumi borrows from Whitehead. What these thinkers have in common, says Massumi, is an understanding of “the world as an ongoing process in continual transformation. It is not concerned with things—certainly not ‘in themselves’—so much as with things-in-the-making, in James’s famous phrase” (Massumi 2015, VIII).

James, Dewey, Whitehead and Massumi have deployed the term experience to overcome the Cartesian subject/object divide, the separation of a ‘knower’ and a ‘known’. The fundamental idea of their philosophy is mutual interaction and involvement, and the possibility for subject and object to constantly switch roles. No one thing or being at any moment is merely subject or only object.

According to James, who may be called the father of process philosophy, for an empiricist philosophy the *relations* between entities are of equal importance and equal reality as the entities themselves: “For an empiricist philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system*” (James 2003, 22, italics James).

Any kind of relation experienced, whether conjunctive or disjunctive, is as real as anything else: this accounts for the radicality of James’s empiricism. The radical empiricist will not privilege the experience of ‘conjunctive relations’ over ‘disjunctive relations’ and will not reject any of them, but accepts them as they come. Contrary to rationalism, which privileges the whole over its parts and emphasizes universals, empiricism, according to James, “lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. My [i.e. James’s] description of things, accordingly, starts with the parts and makes of the whole a being of the second order” (ibid.).

This is why Isabelle Stengers, in *Thinking with Whitehead*, says about empiricism that its goal is to “never go ‘beyond’ usual experience but rather to transform it, to make what usually ‘goes without saying’ matter” (Stengers 2011, 46). Through being reflected upon, ordinary experiences are transformed, the reflection resulting in ‘what usually goes without saying matters’. This is precisely what art practice is often about and what art works can do.

As I said, the concept of experience also implies the idea of mutual interaction and involvement, looking and being looked at, it implies the possibility of subject and object to constantly switch roles.<sup>3</sup> It means movement and changeability of perspectives. The ‘interweaving of change and permanence’, says Whitehead, is ‘the primary fact of experience’; and this interweaving “is at the base of our concepts of personal identity, of social identity,

3\_I have elaborated on this interaction between spectator and art work in *The Perfect Spectator: The Experience of the Art Work and Reception Aesthetics*. Amsterdam: Valiz, to appear in 2016. Dutch e-book: *De volmaakte beschouwer: De ervaring van het kunstwerk en receptie-esthetica*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015.

4\_NU.nl 28 May 2016. <http://www.nu.nl/wetenschap/4267928/grootste-sponsdier-wereld-ontdekt-kust-hawai-.html>

and of all sociological functionings” (Whitehead 1968, 53).

The story of a recent scientific discovery may illustrate this idea of relationship and connectedness, of mutual interaction and involvement. In the month of May of 2016, divers off the coast of Hawaiï tumbled upon the largest sponge in the world.<sup>4</sup> It is 3.5 metres long, 2 metres high and 15 metres wide. This sponge-animal lives on a coral reef at a depth of 2,100 metres near the north western islands of Hawaiï and is possibly several thousands of years old, according to American researchers in the scientific journal *Marine Biodiversity*. The divers filmed and photographed the object from all angles and realized only afterwards, while studying the images, that they had filmed a sponge. The sponge was able to reach its size and age owing to the fact that nature on these islands has not so far been disturbed by human activity.

It is hard to imagine the implications of a life with a time-span of several thousand years for a living being. It is even harder to grasp how the sponge may have experienced the presence of the human divers and the impact on it of this event. This particular sponge will certainly be changed for ever, even if we do not know how, and so will the divers who had the experience of meeting it.

The connectedness of things, which according to Whitehead is ‘the essence of all things of all types’ (1968, 9) has always been a source of inspiration for artists. The well-known poem *Tijd* (Time) by the Dutch poet Vasalis (1940) speaks about the interweaving of change and permanence, and of the switch of perspectives, by referring to the time of the stone: *Ik droomde dat ik langzaam leefde/ langzamer dan de oudste steen. Het was verschrikkelijk: om mij heen/ schoot alles op, schokte en beefde, wat stil lijkt.*<sup>5</sup> The poet, dreaming that she was living slowly, slower than the oldest stone, experiences the passage of time from the perspective of the stone. It is terrifying to watch everything that normally had appeared silent, push up around her from the earth, jerking and trembling, the trees wrenching

themselves from the soil and the swelling and shrinking of the tidal waves as a mere tremor. The poet concludes by asking how she could ever not have known this and how she will ever be able to forget.

In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey describes aesthetic experience as a specific and integral event, with a beginning and an end. Dewey emphasizes the dynamic character of this event, because it takes time to complete; there is a chronological order of reception, development and fulfilment. Not only does a person *undergo* that experience, the actual undergoing is also *perceived*. The undergoing stage is receptive, implying surrender; but adequate surrender is only possible through an intense and controlled activity, through effective action. This merging of surrender and controlled action creates the experience (Dewey 2005, 55, 56).

Dewey's description of aesthetic experience as a specific and dynamic event, in which undergoing and perceiving, or surrender and effective action, are merged, is not only an apt description of what happens in the interaction between art work and spectator, but may also help to understand what is at stake in artistic research. In fact it reveals the challenge the researcher is facing.

While experiencing an art work, the spectator engages in an interaction with an object or event that purposefully addresses the spectator (or audience) and plays an active role in this interaction. Art work and spectator switch roles in observing and being observed, in a process that involves both skill and knowledge. The time of the art work is the duration of this specific reciprocal engagement between art work and spectator. Each art work, whether age-old or contemporary, is actualized or brought to life in the time spent in this interaction. It is a 'merging of surrender and controlled action which creates the aesthetic experience' (Dewey), a going back and forth between spectator and work in a free and unpredictable movement, after which the art work will remain in the memory of the spectator and shape her perspective on the world.

Published in Vasalis's  
collection of poems  
*Parken en woestijnen*,  
Amsterdam: Van Oorschot  
1967 [1940].

This is not any different for the maker of the work, the artist, who experiences the work as the very first spectator. In artistic research, the researcher is expected to elucidate and to reflect critically on this aesthetic experience and on her/his own work, and to contextualize it artistically and theoretically. In doing so, the researcher must take up the position of both insider (the making) and outsider (critical reflection). The researcher has to develop the skills to change gear between these two modes and a way to reflect on this switching between modes.

Perhaps this is much to ask, perhaps it is asking artists to jump over their own shadows. But then, this critical reflection, this switching between the experience of the maker and the experience of the spectator is inherent to art practice. Artists are constantly faced not only by the task of producing the work, but also by the challenge of positioning it in the world, giving it a place, conceptualizing the relationship between it and its environment. To repeat Riley's words: the artist has 'to establish the terms upon which a creative dialogue can be sustained'. Doing art is questioning how to do it. I want to stress the fact that this goes equally for an artist who sets herself the goal of bringing about political or social change as an artist who states that her work addresses eye and ear in a tactile way and simply 'is'. The considerations on how to position one's work are as much political as aesthetic in nature, no matter whether we are dealing with a conventional painting or sculpture, performance, conceptual art or a political/activist art practice.

The work of the American conceptual artist Ian Wilson (1940) may serve as an example. Wilson's practice consists of staging discussions on questions of epistemology. For example, since 1999 Wilson has been organizing an ongoing series of discussions on the topic of the Pure Awareness of the Absolute.

How does Wilson succeed in distinguishing his discussion on the Absolute, as art work, from any other discussion on the Absolute? For the public to be able to perceive the discussion as

art, Wilson has to frame that discussion as such. He does this in the first place by the choice of location, which is usually a museum or art institution. Then he carefully attends to all physical circumstances under which the discussion will take place, from designing the printed invitations to the discussion, to arranging wooden chairs in an oval and presenting the room as a stage. There may be a description on the wall outside the room of Wilson's practice. Participants are aware of the artistic nature of the event and will, upon entering the room, perceive the discussion in this double way: as an engaged discussion on the Absolute *and* as an art work.

A note on terminology is needed here. The concept of 'experience' comes very close to Massumi's 'affect'. Affect means "being right where you are, more intensely" (Massumi 2015, 3). Like experience, affect goes two ways: it is affecting and being affected. Intensified affect comes with "a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places" (ibid., 6). At this point Massumi refers to James's 'connectedness of intensities of experience'. Affect is thinking bodily, accompanied by "a sense of vitality or vivacity, a sense of being more alive" (ibid.). Also, affect has to do with the sense of potential, the sense that there are always more potential ways of affecting or being affected (as in Whitehead's famous dictum: 'There is always more...').

In all of these respects, Massumi's affect is inspired by James's 'connectedness' and Dewey's 'experience' and is akin to my use of experience in relation to art practice and artistic research. But there is a slight difference in meaning between affect and experience as it is meant here. 'Affect' connotes, in a general sense, a certain way of being in the world, being 'open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity' (ibid., xi). Affect is unrelated to intentional activity. In this sense, it is too wide a concept for my argument. 'Experience' refers to a specific and reflected experience. In the words of James: "The peculiarity of our experiences [is] that they not only are,

but are known, which their ‘conscious’ quality is invoked to explain” (James 2013, 13). I therefore prefer the term experience in relation to the issue of artistic research.

I want to emphasize that the terms connectedness, experience, event and affect constitute an aesthetics, an aesthetics that implies morality because these terms play a central role in the quest for an answer to the age old question of ‘how to live’. The answer that is given is that we are an inherent part of our surroundings, that we are implied in our surroundings, physically as well as mentally, and that we need to engage with the world in a continuous process of affecting and being affected. In short, that it is not possible to find any enjoyment in life without being connected and involved with the things around us. This is to say that the aesthetics proposed here has a strong political and ethical meaning. Today, at a time when much attention is paid to the political and societal value, or impact, of art practices, the issue of aesthetics is far too easily brushed aside by both artists and theorists, as an outdated and no longer relevant view of art. I believe this is a mistake. In talking about art we necessarily address the issue of aesthetics. It is my conviction that a coherent perspective on aesthetics always implies political and moral consequences. In art, it is precisely the aesthetics that can make the difference.



# Artistic Research: Fundamental Research

Much has been written on artistic research and the kind of knowledge it (supposedly) produces and that is often referred to as ‘tacit knowledge’. Since artistic research is carried out by artists, artistic research yields knowledge, experiences, insights and understanding that cannot be brought about in other ways: this knowledge (knowing) is embodied in the art works and art practices themselves. Art works do not describe, explain or analyze, but they enact or embody points of view and values. Artistic research, then, is the research into the nature of this enactment and into this embodiment of views and values in specific art works or practices.

Artistic research is a radically speculative discipline, just as art is a radically speculative mode of practice. Speculative thinking does not approach the world as “a grab-bag of things”, but as a dynamic unity which is constantly changing (Massumi 2013, 8). Speculative research is alert to this constant change and dynamism. Therefore it does not have a set goal, nor does it presuppose any fixed outcomes or results. rather, it seeks to open up to multiple perspectives. This openness is a condition for conducting research in art and through art.

As we all know, the political pressure on artists and academics to deliver concrete ‘results’ is enormous. Artists are increasingly expected to create and produce ‘deliverables’ and to be able to demonstrate the social usefulness and commercial value of their ‘products’. Not only concrete art works may count

as such a product, but also creative processes themselves. Obviously, this ‘rendementsdenken’ (interestingly, this term is not translatable into English, but comes close to thinking in terms of concrete return) is inconsistent with the open, speculative and critical-reflexive nature of artistic research. I believe that we should therefore avoid the term ‘knowledge production’ in relation to artistic research. ‘Knowledge production’ belongs to a neoliberal jargon, along with terms like innovation, applicability and valorization.

It is very fortunate that recently, NWO (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek—Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) issued a new call specifically addressing the field of artistic research, recognizing artists as researchers and artistic work as the possible outcome of the research process. This call also recognizes a connection between academia and art practice and the value of the critical reflexive nature of art practice as fundamental research.

As the first (and so far the only) university in the Netherlands, Leiden University has created the possibility for artists to obtain a doctoral degree. A new platform for art practice has been created, that not only, as the past 15 years have shown, provides the need for artists to further their practice in a dialogue with the academic world. This platform also has great symbolical power in demonstrating the importance of the contribution of artists to the cultural debate and in constituting our world, and in furthering and guaranteeing of the greater scope for art that is essential for its existence.

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# Janneke Wesseling, NL

## short bio

Janneke Wesseling has worked as an art critic for the Dutch daily newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* from 1982 to the present. She has published several studies on contemporary art and artistic research. She is director of PhDArts, international doctorate programme in visual art and design, at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts of Leiden University, and Professor and head of the Lectorship in Art Theory & Practice at the University of the Arts, The Hague. In February 2016, Janneke Wesseling was appointed Professor in the Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University (NL). In 2013 Wesseling obtained a doctoral degree at Leiden University with a dissertation on contemporary art and reception aesthetics, entitled *De volmaakte beschouwer: De ervaring van het kunstwerk en de actualiteit van de receptie-esthetica* (The Perfect Spectator: The Experience of the Artwork and the Topicality of Reception Aesthetics).

## Selection of Publications

- *The Perfect Spectator: The Experience of the Art Work and Reception Aesthetics*. Amsterdam: Valiz, to appear in 2016.
- *De volmaakte beschouwer: De ervaring van het kunstwerk en de receptie-esthetica*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015.
- *See it Again, Say it Again: The Artist as Researcher*, ed. Janneke Wesseling. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011.
- *Het museum dat niet bestond*. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2004.
- *Schoonhoven, beeldend kunstenaar*. The Hague /Amsterdam: SDU publishers/ Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1990.

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