

## A DEFENSE OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH

### UMA DEFESA DA INVESTIGAÇÃO EM ARTE

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In this article I will try to defend, first, that there is a sense in which research is not only possible but desirable in art. Second, that there is a minimal set of written/physical components that are the minimal conditions for something to be considered research for art (in Frayling's sense). Third, that the epistemic value of the results is derived from the concept of exemplification as a retriever of value in a dense universe of artistic possibilities. And finally, that artistic research is a tool for empowering the artist if it is done within a set of parameters that gives it some epistemic value.

**Keywords:** Artistic research. Requirements of research for art. Empowerment. Exemplification.

Neste artigo defende-se, em primeiro lugar, que há um sentido em que a investigação em arte não é apenas possível, mas desejável. Em segundo lugar, há um conjunto mínimo de componentes escritos/materiais que são as condições mínimas para que algo seja considerado investigação para a arte (no sentido de Frayling). Terceiro, que o valor epistémico dos resultados é derivado do conceito de exemplificação como origem do valor epistémico no universo denso de possibilidades artísticas. E, finalmente, essa investigação artística é uma ferramenta para capacitar o artista, se isso for feito dentro de um conjunto de parâmetros que lhe dão algum valor epistémico.

**Palavras-chave:** Investigação em arte. Requisitos para investigação em arte. Potencialização. Exemplificação.

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#### 1. Introduction

Much has been said (*e.g.*, Slager 2015; Verwoert 2006) about the PhD in arts in recent years, notably, in Europe at least, since the institution of the Bologna Declaration in 1999. Many artists spoke out against the institutionalization of art under the form of a PhD in Academia and others spoke in favor of the concept. But before we delve into that concrete subject we must note that it is not the Bologna process that is forcing artists to do research a *tout-force* in an institutionalized setting with public norms and control mechanisms. This is just a symptom of a general tendency towards bureaucratization and uniformity

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which is patent not only in academia but in every field of quotidian life, from phone apps and telemarketing to autonomous cars and kitchen robots. The study of this symptom is a sociological problem and I will not discuss it here.

Several critiques have addressed the issue of Bologna's hidden neo-liberal agenda, and it came to symbolize the imposition of neo-liberal goals upon the educational system. I'm not very interested in going into this discussion which is really about power politics between forces that take themselves as guardians of the old ways against the invasive forces of cultural capitalism. This question will not be addressed here.

Another question, prior to assessing the eventual research-mania of the Bologna declaration, is the question of research in itself being good or bad for art and artists. If research is good, then the Bologna process seems to be a beneficial force in the right direction. If not, it should be resisted on those grounds. Still another question is whether Bologna is a force in the good direction *for good reasons* and acts to preserve the virtues and specificities of art, or a force in the good direction but which in the process stifles the art process and endangers artistic freedom, for example.

The view I shall attempt to defend here is that research is good and, furthermore, it constitutes a means for empowering the artist. My attempt is to present *a* defense of artistic research among many other possible forms of going about doing this activity.

Some have questioned the analogy of Art Research to Science Research<sup>1</sup> saying that these are two separate fields with different methodologies, insisting in the 'Two worlds' view proposed by Snow (1998). In this paper I shall explore the concept of 'research' to determine in what way we can make sense of Arts Research in a way that does not simply appeal to a separation between the two worlds. In doing this I shall propose a minimal set of requirements for something to be considered Arts Research.

Here I will focus on artistic research done *for art*<sup>2</sup>, where art is the means and

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<sup>1</sup> The relation between art and science is ancient. Bacon, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, sees them as partners in the experimentation as exploration of the world. This partnership was possible because then, the value function of science and art was the same: the accurate representation of nature. In fact, there was not an explicit separation until after the Enlightenment, caused by the refinement of the epistemological demands of science which were not accompanied in art. After that the separation became deeper culminating in the recognition of the 'two cultures', in 1959, by C.P. Snow (1998) who stated the existence of 'two cultures' by proposing that science and the humanities are distinct and independent cultural fields, both intellectual communities have engaged in a seemingly endless struggle. I do not share this view. Although recognizing that this separation is a sociological fact (and, which is worse, a psychological one also), I think art and science are not incompatible. We need not be afraid of the big bad wolf but engage in an epistemic valorization of art that justifies it as knowledge, and avoid parochial essentialist views of the special status of art. See numerous authors on the episteme of arts Carroll (2004), Freeland (1997), Gibson (2003), Green (2010), Goodman (1968), Lamarque (2010), etc.

<sup>2</sup> In 1993, Christopher Frayling listed the possibilities of an investigative practice in the field of Art and Design. In that communication he listed three types of possible research and aroused a great deal of excitement among researchers. See Durrant, Vines, Wallace & Yee (2017), Friedman (2008), Zimmerman, Forlizzi & Evenson (2007), Zimmerman & Forlizzi (2014), among others. Although, in 1978, Jones had already anticipated Frayling, in this communication, Frayling draws on Herbert Read's (1944) distinction between teaching through art and art and enumerates three types of research in the field of art and design: (a) Research *into* art and design where historical, aesthetic or other possible theoretical frameworks are included. (b) Research *through* art and design, where most of the works are aimed at verifying and understanding the

embodies the result of the research activity. I will not be talking of research *into or through* art, which is currently done in academic institutions and is epistemologically uncontroversial (like art history, critical theory, etc.).

I'll try to discuss the requirements of artistic research as a minimum set of steps and attempt a justification of the use of art-works as the embodiment of the results of artistic research against the need to produce written texts as description or a translation (Benjamin 1996) of the artworks into text (as is required by some PhD programs) but as a written clarification of the artistic concept and a valuable activity on its own.

Finally, I will argue that artistic research is a tool for the artist to take back some control over his practice.

## 2. What is research?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines research as “The systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions”. Of course, this refers to *scientific* research. In the artistic field this surely looks odd and strange, and one imagines that the strict application of this definition to artistic research would not be feasible. Nevertheless, the mounting pressure for academies to comply with the Bologna agreement, when proposing PhD courses, makes this a contested topic in the Arts field where ‘research’ is an ambiguous term and there is a heated debate about the notion of artistic research. One way to begin thinking about this issue is to start with the paradigmatic case as far as ‘research’ is concerned: the case of science.

Scientific research is an “organized and systematic process of answering questions” (Simuforsa & Wiseman 2016, p. 3): it is *systematic* because there is a definite set of procedures and steps which you will follow; it is *organized* in that there is a structure or method in going about doing research; it *finds answers* as the goal of research; it answers *questions* which are central to research. Enlightenment scientists and philosophers aimed to get to the truth. From the Renaissance to the positivists, one common view about research was that science used the inductive method starting from the particular to the general. Science was based on the insights that could be extracted from the accumulation of facts about the world, used to predict events based on inductive reasoning. Karl Popper (2002) challenged this view stating that it does not separate science from metaphysics.<sup>3</sup>

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practice linked to the theory, not from the point of view external to the problem as in the case of research into art and design, but relating and contextualizing both theory and practice with a unique purpose.

(c) Research *for* art and design. Research results in an object, where the first objective is not communication through verbal language, but in the sense of a call to cognition and imagination.

The first two types are consensual and have been used over time in various fields of art, art history, materials science, etc. The third type is the problematic ‘research for art and design’. Frayling himself notes this problem: “The thorny one is Research for art and design (...)” (1993, p. 5). As Biggs (2002) points out, using Wittgenstein’s linguistic logic, the third type is just another way of saying *work of art*.

<sup>3</sup> After the social critiques, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Kuhn (1970), Feyerabend (1993), Bunge (1983), Latour (1993) criticized the meta-narratives of the heroic objective scientist, science became more

He proposed that the main criterion for judging a scientific theory is not via inductive reasoning but by means of falsifiability. This means that, by design, scientific theories at one time are no more than the best available explanation for the known facts and they only stand provisionally until they are falsified by new knowledge. This shifts the positive pronouncements of the enlightened scientist to the permanent methodological uncertainty of science as it is practiced nowadays. So, we can refine the previous definition of research and describe it as the *organized and systematic process of answering questions aiming at building provisional theories that best explain the known facts*. Similarly, theories about art, for instance, have been trying to supersede each other for several centuries (Uidhir & Magnus 2011). Each new theory tries to explain new facts, that is, new artworks, and fit them in its scope, only to be, sooner or later, falsified by some new artwork, leading to the construction of a new theory.

The “organized and systematic” part of Simuforosa’s definition given above refers not only to the enormous body of procedures, protocols, tools, that enable the scientific process, but also to the efficient communication of results. This enables the sharing of knowledge among all the researchers which in turn enables them to incrementally validate and build upon previous knowledge.

The production of ‘results’ is the goal of research and answers the initial question. These results must be produced in a normative way as a set of procedure that allows other researchers to use them effectively. This set of procedures gives science its epistemological value. Nevertheless, one must note, that although the *value of the results* is dependent on the epistemological quality of the research leading to them, importantly, the *value of the results themselves* must be assessed via other means, like the potential applications or theoretical implications in the field.

### 3. What about artistic research?

Can the various components of scientific research listed by Simuforosa be said to apply to artistic research? Henk Slager (2004, p. 12) states that although methods may be different for different fields, they share basic principles: “the methods of research are both concerned with formulating questions and providing the answers to those questions. (...) research can be most adequately described as methodic links between questions and answers or answers and questions — in random order”. The formulation of questions and the search for answers are undoubtedly comprised in the activity of art. These are really the central elements of research. The other aspects of research listed in Simuforosa’s definition are ‘organized’ and ‘systematic’. These, however, are not popular requirements in the world of art, because somehow one feels that being systematic and organized would

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aware of the problems it has as a product of human activity. But the epistemological critique of science (Popper 2002) did not mean that the epistemological ethos and the search for knowledge were abolished or relativized, as some would make us believe. On the contrary, science emerged stronger. See Okasha (2002) for several approaches to this. The consciousness of its limits reduces its probability of repeating some errors of the past.

stifle creativity. De Vries (2004, p.18) sees this as a problem: “In my view, a similarity between the sciences and visual art would involve a different kind of circulation of artworks. In fact, one has to change the practice of the artist in order to get that similarity”.

To be a researcher is to try to go beyond practice and make an effort towards clarification. This must involve some degree of formalization, in order to try to be explicit about our artistic practice, to get a stand in the dialog with the artworld and to make our artistic work more accurately defined. This will provide evidence for its value to the artworld, which ultimately is the evaluator of art, and allow the research circle to be closed. As McAllister (2004) puts it:

*I would say that research is possible if a network of validity exists. (...) I think those network properties exist, (...) but I do believe that networks enable research. I also think that these networks exist in the arts (...). I do not simply mean that results should be published. I think of a network with different places and different contexts where one can judge the validity of the work which, therefore, legitimizes that work. The different contexts and different places which make up a network are very important. (McAllister 2004, p. 21, emphasis added)*

I think this network of validity exists in the artworld and the artist should, by clarifying his research method or artistic practice, be more engaged in the conversation that is unfolding within this network of validity – this, in my view, should be the ethos of artistic research.

#### **4. A division of labor**

In many areas of human activity, it makes sense to distinguish between those people who dedicate themselves to everyday practice (practitioners) and those who conduct research for the advancement of that practice (researchers). So, for example, in medicine some devise new surgical procedures and new medicines and others apply that knowledge in everyday practice. In engineering some develop new materials and processes and others apply them in their practice. In agriculture some devise new seeds or fertilizers and others use them in their everyday activities. The researchers must use a set of protocols which gives epistemological value to the knowledge produced and validates it for the use of practitioners. With notable differences<sup>4</sup>, this two-level division between researchers and practitioners can be found in most human activities. Is this the case in art?

In pure theoretical fields, the research is done in a much more rigid framework as there is no other means of evaluating its epistemological value. In more empirical-technological fields, the researcher relies somewhat on the practitioner to validate his results, and the validation comes from the repeated application of the results in a successful manner. This is the case of surgical research. In these fields the research and the practice are two sides of the process that produces knowledge and then validates it

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<sup>4</sup> For example: pure theoretical fields.

through repeated practice.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes the roles of researcher and practitioner are present in the same individual. The practitioner role is not closed to some degree of research. If a practitioner finds an innovative way to do something, can this be considered research? It can, if and only if there is an effort to observe research protocols: to make results public and then to prove that they are valid when challenged. In this case a practitioner assumes the role of researcher. If the practitioner keeps the information to herself it cannot be considered research. Research is a collective effort to enlarge knowledge. So, we can say that Einstein's research *results*, or Cézanne's research *results* were better than others, because their impact on future scientific or artistic practice was far wider than others. But can we say that their *research* (as a practice) was better? The answer cannot be a direct yes because one would need to assess their research practice. Maybe they came to their results by chance, or they did not publicize them themselves and someone else did it later. So, we need to distinguish the *results* from the *research practice*. The *results* will be judged by their impact on society and will not be discussed here. *Research practice* should be evaluated by the adherence to some basic requirements of publicity (clarity, formal methodology, formal presentation, etc.) and by the engagement with others over challenges to their validity. When a practitioner engages in such an activity, *he ceases to be a practitioner* and becomes someone else — a researcher — who engages in an activity fundamentally different from his daily practice. It is in this new role that she reflects upon her own practice and relates it to other people's practices in a meaningful dialog. In every other field of human knowledge people can be recognized as great practitioners without being researchers. The research procedures are the way researchers have to engage meaningfully in the relevant discussion unraveling within a field.

To engage in this ongoing discussion in the field artists are sometimes pressed to write texts as an 'output' of their research. De Vries (2004) caution us against this:

There are some artists who write about their own work, but these are seldom the most interesting texts. Thus, I am not sure that art would improve if artists were forced to reason about their work. I do believe that *one has to be cautious in disrupting that division of labor*, that distinction between the production of art and the reasoning about art. (Vries 2004, pp.17-18, emphasis added)

De Vries is arguing that the artist is good at doing art and the critic is good at producing critical texts and building theories so one should be cautious "in disrupting that division of labor". But I find it difficult to see how increasing the knowledge of both artist and critic and enhancing their interaction can be detrimental for artistic practice. On the contrary, it seems to me that only beneficial dialog can come, with the critic and within the artist himself, from shortening the gap of this 'division of labor'.

The use of this argument in a scientific context reveals its strangeness, as we would not call upon the scientific researcher's inability to write *interesting texts* as a reason not

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<sup>5</sup> This is what Kuhn (1970) refers to as *normal science*.

to write them. The aim of the researcher is not writing interesting texts but to make his work explicit and open to criticism, as this is the basis of the dialog with the field's community. The job of an experimental researcher is to characterize as completely as possible the conditions and effects of some phenomenon. If an artist wants to become a researcher, she must try to make clear the conditions and characteristics of the artworks she produces.

The artist is always the first audience of the artwork. The artist-researcher must also be its first critic.

### **5. Artistic research as applied or experimental research, an analogy**

We can make an analogy of the artist with a chemist in the lab. In the lab the chemist produces new facts (new compounds for example). As an applied researcher the output must be something in the general vicinity of this: describing the working framework (state of the art)<sup>6</sup>, the chemical reactions and the new compounds obtained. Then she must show how these compounds are different or maybe better than existing ones (within a theoretical framework – stated on the state of the art). She must show that she found new facts in the world. These new-facts-in-the-world are her contribution to the field, even if they are not 'better' by existing criteria. It suffices to be demonstrably different – a demonstrable new fact. Simply by being demonstrably different, these new-facts-in-the-world have enumerative value. They will be used either to falsify or to add confirmation to existing theories.

Artistic research can operate just like this: the artist produces her works within a theory of art background – even if she goes against it. These works are the new facts-in-the-world. Then she must persuade others that these are indeed new-facts-in-the-world. If successful, these will add to existing theories or work against them (present or future). In fact, there are many examples in the artworld of artworks subverting existing art theories.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that artistic research lacks strong definite validation criteria for deciding what is 'good' art is not detrimental to the validity of research, as will be discussed below. The research will be good as long as it demonstrates that the facts produced are a contribution to the field. It is sufficient to establish the distance from one artist's work to the work of other artists. The degree of success in this endeavour is directly relevant to the quality of the research.

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<sup>6</sup> This are sometimes referred to 'literature review'.

<sup>7</sup> For example, with the appearance of the ready-made, or conceptual art, new theories of art were in order. When Duchamp presented his fountain, he questioned the art theories of his day forcing reflection and eventual arrival at new theories of art. The same can be said about Warhol's Brillo boxes. This art-fact is a finite object taken from the infinite realm of possibilities and is set against a background Artworld, questioning or confirming its premises. In this sense, these art-facts worked just like the Michelson–Morley experiment that falsified previous theories based on the concept of ether. These art-facts forced additional discussion and eventually led to a better understanding of the field.

Hence, I argue, the artistic research should generally follow this structure:

- 1) Defining the artistic concept;
- 2) Assessing the relevant state of the art for the characterisation of the artworld framework;
- 3) Producing art works as the embodiment of the results of research;
- 4) Establishing the distance/relation to the framework described in the state of the art.

We should note that step 4) is actually more difficult in arts than in science, since art operates in a dense field and therefore must deal with a continuous dense epistemological background, as there is no clear method to differentiate between artworks. At the same time, it's easier to appear 'new', in the sense that a small difference can be interpreted as a bigger difference. Ultimately, as in the chemist analogy, the value of the difference will not be judged by the artist (or chemist) herself but by the larger community of experts (artworld/chemistry community). The value of the results can be questioned. However, this does not undermine the value of the research if the research adheres to a set of rigorous steps.

## 6. A minimal structure for artistic research

A research work is usually comprised first of a State of the art, where the researcher characterizes the field she is operating in; then usually there is a description of the research process itself (hypotheses, premises, methods, results, etc.); and finally the researcher usually produces an (hopefully persuasive) argument defending that the obtained results are a contribution to the field.

Every artist has an artistic interest that is reflected in her works. But this is not general, as 'I'm interested in painting', but some specific personal concept particular to her. The clarification of this Artistic Concept is the most important step in a research project, as it works as a hypothesis and as a result at the same time. I believe that the clear refinement of the Artistic Concept is the essence of Artistic research. I'll say something more on this below.

To do a state of the art in arts is really the same as in any other field of human knowledge. The researcher goes about the business of learning as much as possible about the relevant field, literature, conferences, art exhibitions, critical texts. This is a process that informs his research, it cannot be separated from it. The failure to do an extensive inquiry can cause the artist to fall into a naivety trap. The establishment of the relevant state of the art is a step that is basic to most research fields. It sets the basis from where the artistic concept starts and the background against which the artwork produced will be set and assessed. It should be as narrow and deep as possible, but as it is a normal thing to do in a research environment, I will not discuss it at length here.

The making of artworks being the embodiment of the results of artistic research is the most problematic issue discussed at universities when regulations come to impose a written 'complement' or even a substantial part of a PhD thesis in the domain of the arts,

as artists ‘feel’ that they do research *through the artworks* and writing texts does not bring anything additional to their art. I will discuss this below as I believe this to be an important aspect of the artistic research project.

The last step, remarking on the difference between your work and of others, is also an important aspect and the one that will persuade others that the artwork has something to add to the field of art, that is, it points to the contribution of the work. This concept is also not a problematic issue so I will not address it further.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, in my view, in order for there to be something as artistic research work it should consist both<sup>9</sup> of a written part and of the production of art-objects. The written part as a means of *facilitating* communicability and dialog within the research community, and the production or objectual part as the *embodiment* of results. So, *research for art* should comprise the following minimal set of components:

- 1) Written definition of the artistic concept;
- 2) Written state of the art;
- 3) Art objectual<sup>10</sup> embodiment of results;
- 4) Written discussion of the artwork’s contribution to the field.

So, the aim is not to write an explanation or a written translation of the physical work, but a communicable clarification of your artistic concept and its distance from other artists’ concepts, given the relevant state of the art.

## 7. The ‘Artistic Concept’ and building a state of the art

In order to clarify the Artistic Concept we can see the production of works as the embodiment of the results of research and should try to establish in the most explicit way the *sanction* of the artist, as Sherri Irvin puts it:

The artist’s sanction (...) is an outgrowth of the artist’s intentional activity, though not equivalent to his or her intention (...). Like the colors of a painting, and unlike mere intention, the sanction is publicly accessible because it has been established through particular actions and communications by the artist. (Irvin 2005, p. 321)

The actions referred to by Irvin are the artworks, texts, communications, etc., and they are the basis for establishing what, in the dialog with critical interpretation, is the view of the artist.<sup>11</sup> Irvin considers it an ‘outgrowth’ of the artist activity. But for the artist-researcher it is enmeshed in the artistic process, it is not something done after the work of art, it’s done as a thought process leading to *artworks with a clear artistic concept*. The

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<sup>8</sup> The *concept* of differentiation is not problematic but, in the Arts, can be challenging to assess.

<sup>9</sup> These ‘parts’ are not an order of thing to do but an interchangeable dialog between productive concepts.

<sup>10</sup> In ‘art objectual’ I include all forms of art.

<sup>11</sup> An (non-research) artist also establishes the sanction albeit informally. A research artist endeavors to establish it in a formal explicit way.

Artistic Concept is, at the same time, a statement of the intention of the artist and a clear basis for others to engage with it.

Most artists engage in this thought process in some degree. Artistic research is the activity that brings this thought process forward and relates it to the artworld in which the artist operates. This is not new, and a lot of artists already do this in some degree, inside or outside the academic context.

Dieter Lasage (2009) states a possible definition of artistic research but at the same time warns against its dangers. This is the definition he gives:

The notion of artistic research implies that artistic practice can be described in a way more or less analogous to scientific research. An artistic project, then, *begins with the formulation, in a certain context, of an artistic problem*, which necessitates an investigation, both artistic and topical, into a certain problematic, which may or may not lead to an artwork, intervention, performance or statement, with which the artist positions himself/herself with regard to the initial artistic problem and its context. (Lasage 2009, p. 5, emphasis added)

What Lasage is referring to is a hypothesis. Scientific research is done by ‘obtaining’ a finite hypothesis that is then analyzed and judged against a set of criteria that assess its value. This hypothesis aims to become a theory that explains all the known facts relevant to the theory and its value reflects its capacity of explaining all the relevant facts. The selection of these relevant facts is the first crucial step towards the definition of the scope of the proposed theory/hypothesis. After the enumeration of all the relevant facts, the theory can be evaluated. When a new fact emerges that satisfies the taxonomic criteria of belonging to the set of ‘relevant’ facts, it can be used to test the theory, which in turn can either be falsified or can resist falsification (Popper 2002).

In art this concept of hypothesis can be also of instrumental value. I shall not call it hypothesis because it suggests an unwarranted analogy with the scientific case. Instead I shall use the familiar term ‘artistic concept’ of the artwork. The artist does not create the artwork in a void. She creates it with some intention, that is, it is made to fulfill some criteria of value, even if these criteria are entirely personal or unconscious. As Monroe Beardsley (2012, p. 58) puts it: “An artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy an aesthetic interest.” This *aesthetic interest* is a general one and it can encompass the visual, the conceptual, etc. But Beardsley puts his emphasis on the concept of *intention*, which he then proceeds to refine. This *intention* is commonly associated with the subsequent presentation of the artwork to the public, even if the ‘public’ is reduced to the artist herself, in the same manner of Pollock (1947) who would ‘get acquainted’ with his own paintings.<sup>12</sup> Or as Dickie (2012, p. 53) has it: “A work of

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<sup>12</sup> Jackson Pollock (1947), in *My Painting* (apud Karmel 1999, p. 18). The full quotation is: “I continue to get further away from the usual painter’s tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added. When I am in my painting, I’m not aware of what I’m doing. It is only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about. (...) the painting has a life of its own. (...) It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the

art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.” So, in my view, the artistic concept is embodied in the intention of the artist when creating a particular artifact that will be evaluated when presented (to whomever).

This *intention*<sup>13</sup>, embodied in the artistic concept, is a composite of personal expectations, expression, expectation of public reception or critical response, insertion in artistic movements, dialog with other works, etc. Only the artist can try to formulate this *a priori* as the reflection of her intention, and it will be the basis for confirming or rejecting the expectations or beliefs *of the artist* and steer future work.

When stating his artistic concept, the artist-researcher can find value in the clarification of all the criteria and values instantiated by the artwork, and make the taxonomic effort to position the artwork against the background of all the ‘relevant’ artworks, that is, an effort to build a relevant state of the art. It can be seen as a taxonomic effort to evaluate artistic-intentions artifacts/artworks-to-be into existing categories or, if this is not possible, to create new categories of classification.

Arriving at the artistic concept is a difficult process and the artist should examine his practice and compare it with the current and past practice of others, and also through art history and criticism. This is a laborious process and encompasses tasks as going to exhibitions, doing literature reviews, engaging with other artists, critics, academia, etc. With all this information in mind the artist can have an informed-intention when producing the artifact.

The Artistic Concept is an instrumental tool that starts as the hypothesis and, in the end, becomes the result of the research. It is refined during the research endeavor and is informed by the practice and the state of the art. It is the artist-researcher effort to clarify and be the first critic of her own work.

## 8. The epistemology of the embodiment

How can artworks be considered the embodiment of results and give the research some epistemic value? That would somehow imply that the artwork *itself* could bring knowledge to the artistic research endeavour. Does it make sense to talk about Knowledge in art?

For art to be a source of knowledge it must be able to be knowledge *as art*. This means that we are not talking about getting knowledge *from* art.<sup>14</sup> It is undisputed that we can get knowledge *from* art, as art historians and other scientists do, by analyzing art works and producing discourses about them. What we mean here is not this kind of knowledge that extracts facts from artworks, but knowledge that can be produced by the experiencing of the artwork and that cannot be obtained by other sciences applied to the

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painting come out well.”

<sup>13</sup> This *intention* should not be confused with the use of the word in *Intentionalist* views that use it as a basis for the *a-posteriori interpretation* of artworks.

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 1.

artwork.

When talking about the possibility of art being a source of knowledge (John 2005) we can situate the discussion between two extremes: 1) the enthusiastic defense coming from people who say that they can learn from art and have done so and came by personal experience to insights only possible by engaging with an artwork, and, 2) people that deny this possibility stating that art does not meet the traditional criteria of well justified true belief (Stolnitz 1992). Both positions admit that an artwork can be the source of various experiences, but the denier states that these experiences are not knowledge, being, at most, ways of explaining or underlining knowledge obtained by other means.

The mere repetition of knowledge is trivial<sup>15</sup>, so knowledge must come about in an *artistic way* so as to qualify as artistic knowledge. As Eileen John puts it:

Art is one of the phenomena which show traditional models of propositional knowledge to be inadequate. We need a theory of knowledge which embraces such things as knowing how to perceive, imagine, and feel aptly, and knowing what a certain experience is like. Finally, the cognitively stimulating powers of art are a good resource for studying the role of such factors as creativity, surprise, interest, and choice in the emergence of new ideas. (John 2005, p. 339)

Stolnitz (1992) in an article entitled “The Cognitive Triviality of Art”, objected to the possibility of art being a source of knowledge stating that any knowledge that could come from artworks would be trivial in the sense that it could be attained by other (more efficient) ways. There have been several responses to this thesis.<sup>16</sup> These responses center on the various aspects of cognitivism, usually accusing Stolnitz of setting the bar too high by using traditional propositional knowledge as a criterion for judging artworks, and, although recognizing that art cannot meet the traditional criteria, affirming that art can still be a source of knowledge albeit not of the propositional kind.

Scientific knowledge is propositional by design. It constructs discrete (as finite enumerable) categories that enable the modeling of the real world. But the real world is *dense* as defined by (Goodman 1968), not discrete. This categorical discretization simplifies the real and enables the construction of well-defined sets of objects and concepts that are the basis for the propositional deductive logic of science (Popper 2002). The fact that propositional logic is a discrete modelization of a dense world makes it incomplete. It makes it falsifiable by the next counterexample. Therefore, a scientific theory must evolve to account for all the new observed facts evolving within dialectic with the real world, which is dense. When a theory grows to account for more new facts, it enhances its range; but since it is based on finite categories it cannot aspire to the full modeling of a dense world. Note that this is done by design. It’s not a problem, it’s a feature. This feature allowed for the wonderful insights that science has brought to humanity. But we must not forget that this is done via the simplification of a dense reality.

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<sup>15</sup> Although essential for learning purposes and to be able to recognize innovation. See Gould (1994).

<sup>16</sup> Carroll (2004); Freeland (1997); Gibson (2003); Green (2010); John (2005); Lamarque (2010); Vidmar (2015); Vidmar (2010).

Propositional knowledge is a subset of all knowledge. It is the knowledge for which it is possible in a particular moment in history to obtain a simplified model of reality.

Art aims at assessing the remaining infinite world. This cannot be done in a propositional way. Morris Weitz (2012) in his landmark essay remarks that the concept of art is an ‘open concept’:

‘Art,’ itself, is an open concept. New conditions (cases) have constantly arisen and will undoubtedly constantly arise; new art forms, new movements will emerge, which will demand decisions on the part of those interested, usually professional critics, as to whether the concept should be extended or not. Aestheticians may lay down similarity conditions but never necessary and sufficient ones for the correct application of the concept. With ‘art’ its conditions of application can never be exhaustively enumerated *since new cases can always be envisaged or created by artists*, or even nature, which would call for a decision on someone’s part to extend or to close the old or to invent a new concept. (Weitz 2012, pp. 15-16, emphasis added)

The ‘new cases’ that are constantly emerging are cases which the artist, through his practice, takes from the infinite set located in the dense analog space of possibilities, and produces an artwork reducing the possibility to a concrete artifact. This artifact can be viewed as a proposition in the sense that *it exists* and can therefore be compared to any set of criteria of value. It can, for example, be assessed for ‘good painting’ or ‘inclusion in the set of constructivist sculpture’. We can ask ‘is this artwork a good impressionist painting?’, that is, does it fulfill all the established criteria for that kind of painting? The concrete artwork can be assigned a value in each criterion, a continuous value between the extremes true/false. This is not propositional logic in the Boolean sense, as it can assume more than just true/false values; it’s more like an arithmetic operation with a continuous domain and codomain. But its stake on *being in existence* is what makes it a fact for art theories to elaborate on.

Nelson Goodman lists four conditions necessary to the occurrence of art (Goodman, 1968). He lists *semantic* and *syntactic density* as symptoms of the presence of art. These are absent from propositional logic by design. Scientific syntax is finite. Scientific semantics aims at finitude by the precise delimitation of concepts.

Goodman also adds *syntactic repleteness* and *exemplification*. Again, propositional logic tries to be contrary to *syntactic repleteness* as it aims at the simplification of the individual concepts and the invariance of other variables not under study. *Exemplification* will be discussed below as it is the central concept for artistic research.

## 8.1. Artworks as exemplification

Elgin (1991) draws epistemic parallels between art<sup>17</sup> and science focusing on *exemplification* and the ways it enhances understanding in arts, the sciences, and elsewhere. Here she follows Nelson Goodman (1968) and his symbolic theory of art. They clarify the use of examples as denotation metaphors of properties to be exemplified and state that “Not all exemplification is expression, but all expression is exemplification” (Goodman 1968, p. 52).

An exemplar serves to exemplify the feature that is instantiated. One exemplar can exemplify one feature and not another. Thus, a Brillo Box exemplifies the ability of an object to be considered art without having any technical brilliance in the traditional sense associated with its execution, but not as an exemplar of figurative sculpture. An exemplar becomes a symbol of the characteristic that is exemplified. This symbol, or sign, has the signifier as the exemplar, and the signified is what is meant to be exemplified. Thus, Michelangelo’s *Pietà* is an exemplar of the pain of the mother after the child’s death: it is an example of sculpture, a sign whose meaning can instantiate maternal pain. However, this relation is not univocal because an object can be exemplary of several characteristics. For example, the *Pietà* may still be an exemplar of realism or humanism. However, it is not an exemplar of the depth of field even if we can speak about it relating to this work.

The exemplar provides an epistemic access to the characteristic to be exemplified. It is a representative instance of this characteristic. The exemplars are vehicles of exploration of the dense universe of possibilities. But not all instantiations are epistemically relevant as exemplars. For example, the *Pietà* is not an epistemically relevant instantiation of medical anatomy. Although this sculpture may be anatomically correct, it has no value as a basis for the study of medical anatomy (but may have such value in artistic anatomy). Constable’s clouds do not offer epistemic access to weather phenomena.

The exemplars require interpretation that makes evident the characteristic exemplified and the way in which this exemplification operates. This interpretation can be done by the artist, or by someone else. It may not be evident when the work is produced and only becomes evident in another historical context. The artistic concept is the statement of the proposed interpretation done by the artist herself that clarifies the *artistic realness* of the work by stating how the exemplification is operating in the art work. Thus the Artistic Concept is the explanation, the clarification of the *artistic-heavy-lifting* being done by the art work and how it operationalizes its *exemplification*. By being written it can be fixated, and submitted to scrutiny, and can be accepted, rejected or revised by others.

The epistemic validity of an exemplar is not given as being ‘true’ in some sense, or because it is the fruit of ‘a justified true belief’, but because it is a fact brought to light, taken from the obscurity of the infinite field of possibilities, which is paradigmatic of the characteristic that is intended to be given attention.

As Elgin (1991) puts it:

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<sup>17</sup> Elgin is referring to Literature, but the comparison can be enlightening when applied to visual arts.

An exemplar affords epistemic access to the features it exemplifies. (...) *It presents those features in a context contrived to render them salient.* This may involve unraveling common concomitants, filtering out impurities, clearing away unwanted clutter, presenting in unusual settings.(...) What is wanted then is not just an instance or an obvious instance, but a telling instance - one that reveals, discloses, conveys aspects of itself. And it is by referring to those aspects that an exemplar points them up, singles them out, focuses on them. *It thereby presents them for our scrutiny.* (...) Exemplars, being symbols, require interpretation. To understand a painting, an experiment, even a paint sample, requires knowing which of its aspects exemplify and what features they refer to. (Elgin 1991, p. 5, emphasis added)

So, exemplars present those features in a context contrived to render them salient for our scrutiny. They allow us to assess the accuracy and adequacy of its background assumptions. By going to extremes, exemplars bring features to the fore, delineating their characteristics, demarcating their boundaries, disclosing patterns of concurrence and independence. In Art, the adequacy of an aesthetic ‘experiment’ is tested not by trying to produce exactly the same effect in exactly the same way, but by trying to project the exemplified feature or family beyond the work that first exemplifies it.

In a dense field the artist making artworks is really working in the *exemplification* effort and thus contributing to the exploration of the relevant field, as long as she demonstrates that she is not merely repeating previous work. The research will be good as long as it demonstrates that the works produced are a contribution to the field. It is sufficient to establish the distance from the artist’s work to the work of others. The degree of success in this endeavour is directly relevant to the quality of the research.

Exemplars, being symbols, require interpretation. The artist should provide her own as artistic sanction, be it doing her main activity of creating artworks, or by other accessory means, like texts. This should be the output of the artistic research structure and the result of the evolution of the artistic concept from initial hypothesis to end result.

## 9. Establishing the contribution and taking back control

The last step in artistic research should be based on the results, as stated above, and with the background established as to the state of the art. The artistic concept should be assessed so as to make the case for the results being a contribution to the field. This is where the taxonomic zeal will pay off, as limiting the boundaries and setting a basis for comparison. This assessment cannot be done in the strict scientific way of falsifiability<sup>18</sup>, as the universe of possibilities is *dense and replete* (Goodman 1968) but in a continuum

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<sup>18</sup> The problem is clearly stated by Popper (2002, p. 18). The aim of science is to demarcate itself from metaphysics. The falsifiability test he proposes is such a ‘demarcation’ criteria: “(...) it must be possible for an empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience”. Here, Popper is referring to empirical statements like “It will rain here tomorrow” that are susceptible of being falsified by future facts. Interestingly the statement “It will rain or not rain here tomorrow” is not considered by Popper as an empirical one and is not fit to be studied within the scientific method.

aiming at persuasion.

One effect of art research would be for the artist to attain a more-in-control position over her own art and engaging in a meaningful discussion with other agents in the artworld (critics, curators, theorists), not just producing an item and sitting back expecting it to be interpreted and framed by others-in-control of the artworld. The omission by the artists to locate themselves within the parameters of the artworld gives the power to others. In fact, it is the artworld that makes or breaks a candidate work. Artists are relinquishing the control over their works and giving it to critics and curators because they fail to provide explicit evidence for their claim that the object *x* is an artwork.

But there are certain aspects and predicates of the object/candidate that can only be assessed first hand by the artist himself, and this puts him in a privileged position to discuss the artwork within the artworld framework.<sup>19</sup>

Artistic research can be a tool to take control of the effects of their artistic practice and the narrative the artworld has about them. Hermann Pitz (2004) sees this very clearly when writing about PhD research programs:

In that sense a PhD degree could be an interesting sort of emergency exit for young artists who decide by themselves - or through their work as it happens to be – to be an artist for artists only i.e. outside of the tribal success system. For those artists it could be interesting to say ‘why don’t I try to invent a new artistic personality.’ Those new personalities could indeed be *people who reflect on the work they make themselves* or what they see in their community. (Pitz 2004, p. 27, emphasis added)

## 10. Conclusion

In this paper I argued that artistic research has epistemic value on its own. The epistemic value of the results is derived from the concept of *exemplification* as a retriever of value from a dense universe of artistic possibilities. Artistic research is a tool for empowering the artist if it is done within a set of parameters that gives it epistemic value. I propose that it must comply with a minimal set of requirements, some expressed via textual discourse others via artwork production. These are the development of an artistic concept, which acts as a center for building a state of the art which in turn will be the background against which the specific contribution of the artist-researcher is assessed. The contribution is the result of the research which is embodied by the artworks expressing artistic concept.

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<sup>19</sup> This is not *intentionalism* as its emphasis is on the construction of the artistic concept and not on the critical reception.

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