

Postresearch!

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The article addresses the situation of research in art institutions and its contradictions. Can postresearch become a critical impulse for artistic research? The proposition of “postresearch” was first introduced in the European context of artistic research when the 9th Bucharest Biennale, “Farewell to Research”, curated by Henk Slager in 2020 was announced. The philosopher Peter Osborne consequently analyzed the concept of postresearch and its self-contradictory claim of wanting to leave the research paradigm.¹ He emphasized that artistic research must fulfil a non-administrative function, as does the “concept of art” by neglecting or revising its form. In comparison, higher education standards and academic legitimization processes of artistic research follow stricter standardization rules (e.g., written supplements). If artistic research neither competes with the “concept of art” (whatever that is?) nor acts as a legitimate science or discipline and furthermore does not escape administration, should these practices reclaim their status as art?

Within the unresolved question of how to position artistic research between art and science – or more specifically in the humanities – lies also its attraction, its character or junction for crossing disciplines and critical studies. Artistic research has what the theorist Natalie Loveless called a polydisciplinamorous character which can lead future debates from methodological introspection to collaborate in postresearch practices.

Keywords: postresearch concepts, cognitive capitalism, institutional critique, polydisciplinamory, futurities of Artistic Research

1 See Peter Osborne, “Not Going Back - But Not Forward to There Either: Once More on Art and/as Research”, in *The Postresearch Condition*, ed. Henk Slager (Utrecht: Metropolis M Books, 2021), 5–13.

This article focusses on concepts of postresearch, or more precisely the critical impulses of postresearch, which bring up perspectives and points for discussions on the future of artistic research.²

At first, the proposition of postresearch appeared in the context of artistic research through the 9th Bucharest Biennale in 2020, curated by Henk Slager, named “Farewell to Research.” The format of the biennale produced a closer relationship to contemporary art and its audience by primarily exhibiting artistic research practices. Unfortunately, the biennale was postponed due to Covid-19 and resulted in the publication of scripts, texts, and content in digital formats instead of exhibitions. Slager refers in the title to Paul Feyerabend’s *Farewell to Reason* and addresses the dominant trend of academization in the arts in the last decade.³ He proposes:

Could a “farewell” to such gentrified artistic research produce novel forms of articulation while proceeding from the perspective of contemporary art? Above all it needs to be emphasized that, in line with Feyerabend’s treatise, “farewell” should not be seen as a denial of importance, but particularly as showing the limitation of being increasingly institutionalized. To say farewell is not a departure, but a re-visit and a re-start.⁴

A conference was held at the beginning of 2021 speculating on “The Postresearch Condition”⁵ hosted by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where Peter Osborne pointed to the conditions of art education in Europe. Osborne analyzed the concept of postresearch as self-contradictory, claiming on the one hand, to leave the research paradigm in the arts and forces of administration in academia today under cognitive capitalism – when at the same time more students are enrolling in PhD programs. Osborne emphasized in his talk that the role of artistic research in

2 The term artistic research is used here as an umbrella term, which includes the discourse about artistic research and research practices in this field.

3 Henk Slager, “After the Research Turn”, *MaHKUscript: Journal of Fine Art Research* 4 (1), 16 (2020): 1–2, doi:<https://doi.org/10.5334/mjfar.87>.

4 Ibid.

5 The EARN/NWO Smart Culture Conference “The Postresearch Condition” took place January 26-30, 2021. The conference was organized in collaboration with HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, NWO (Dutch Research Council), and BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht. More information: www.hku.nl/postresearchcondition.

art schools should have a non-administrative function, which the “concept of art”, as he states, does by constantly neglecting or revising its form.⁶ Artistic research must consequently operate with a dual consciousness, Osborne remarks, which revises disciplinarity and at the same time follows higher education standards and legitimation processes which are bound to stricter rules of standardization compared to the fine arts (e.g. written supplements as well as presentation and publication standards within academic discourse).

Since artistic research has taken many direction crossing disciplines, it will stay nomadic, and at the same time it is highly institutionalized. But the central question raised above by Slager is whether artistic research should restart from/or revisit contemporary art and whether this is a critical postresearch impulse leaving the academic research community. This would mean a need to revisit the concepts of artistic research from the perspective of doing research within the field of exhibition making and practices of collaborating with the arts. Since research plays a paramount role in the arts, what would happen if artistic research stops crossing disciplines and becomes solely a field within the arts? Would this change anything?

Osborne’s radical criticism further discusses the future of art schools by concluding:

Under current social and political conditions in Europe, we are more likely to get art schools without art than we are to get any kind of post research condition. To survive as an artist-researcher within this context, there is thus a need to cultivate a kind of dual-consciousness by which the immanent logic and artistic significance of a practice can be translated into the administrative language of practice as research, hopefully without thereby destroying it in the process.⁷

6 Peter Osborne, *Not Going Back - But Not Forward to There Either: Once More on Art and/as Research*, Lecture, HKU University of the Arts, Utrecht and Art, Design & Museology, UCL Institute of Education, London, May 21, 2021.

7 Peter Osborne, “Not Going Back - But Not Forward to There Either: Once More on Art and/as Research”, in *The Postresearch Condition*, ed. Henk Slager (Utrecht: Metropolis M Books, 2021), 11.

Osborne's perspective tries to take a stand for the fine arts or the art departments inside the art school as the central place where research and art practice today are generated and put in relation. He assumes that the development of art practices under these conditions "reproduce the condition of its own negation as art."⁸

In other words, the research paradigm for artists who are increasingly becoming artist-researchers because academic research requires an intelligibility which can be translated into the administrative language of research funding and university standards and produces preconditions under which art becomes impossible. Instead of looking at the critical epistemologies and potentials of artistic research today, Osborne headlines art in theory, in terms of Marcel Duchamp, that "art is a relation between an art idea (which, as an idea, is in a certain sense infinite) and the contingent materiality of its means of actualization – mediated, we might add, by its conditions of reception."⁹ The administrative idea of art "practice as research" cannot get close to the ontological structure of art, he adds.¹⁰

More important here are the working conditions under which the dual consciousness in or outside art institution produces its own precarity (wages and self-employment) and therefore is determined by struggles of social justice, rather than criticizing the politics on the state of policies for higher education standards in the arts. It is easy to agree with Osborne's radical criticism when considering the role of the university or art school, where precarious and free labor is approved, and activist groups such as the Precarious Workers Brigade have addressed the conditions of labor in the arts for many years. And artistic research as a critical epistemology does not change this situation; rather, it makes it worse. Should artistic research consequently reclaim its status as art (even *after* the PhD) and leave the HAEIs (higher arts education institutions) to become self-organised as an artist-researcher or part of a research collective.

Olafur Eliasson's art practice, which is research based, could be a reference here. Eliasson has established and hosted an independent study group, named Institut für Raumexperimente, in his studio complex, which

8 Osborne, "Not Going Back - But Not Forward to There Either: Once More on Art and/as Research", 6.

9 Ibid., 9.

10 Ibid., 9.

is funded by the state and has the aim to extend the discursive structure of the university, where it grew out of. Eliasson is an entrepreneurial artist who owns and runs his own research lab, college, and discourse. Studio Olafur Eliasson functions as an enterprise and at the same time has an association with HAEIs. On a micropolitical level, community-based research groups only exist through state project funding and therefore follow funding policies. Florian Cramer writes in his contribution to the “postresearch condition” about research practices of self-organized collectives facing managerial visions of artistic research,

that artistic research is understood among others as a project-oriented contemporary art practice, as lab science done in collaboration with artists and designers, as art school PhD trajectories or as academic research whose outcomes are audiovisual and performative rather than research papers. But the question is whether, with its institutional establishment, some or most of these understandings will be marginalized or in the worst case killed off.¹¹

Cramer’s contribution problematizes another important aspect of the administrative preconditions and hierarchies underlying entry requirements followed by processes of marginalization. Matters of institutionalization at large determine the creative industries and futurities of artistic research projects after academia.

Cramer further states, “. . . when institutions retrofit it [artistic research] into a mainstream academic research epistemology, they may think that they are emancipating the arts. In reality, however they rather seem to emancipate themselves from them, in times where art institutions have outgrown the arts.”¹²

The primary postresearch impulse to agree on must be therefore the criticism of the conditions for artistic research today. The analysis on “Artistic Research in the Future Academy” by Danny Butt rethinks the role of artistic research in academia. His thesis proposes that artistic research

11 Florian Cramer, “Artistic Research – dead on arrival?,” in *The Postresearch Condition*, ed. Henk Slager (Utrecht: Metropolis M Books, 2021), 23.

12 *Ibid.*, 25.

inside the university or art school today is an impossible task, but nonetheless, it has the potential to transform the university today.¹³ Butt writes, “it is possible to understand artistic research as a form of inquiry that may fundamentally question the university’s role”.¹⁴ Furthermore he concludes:

... the most important knowledge-making in the visual arts is precisely - ironically - a performative institutional critique of these new constraints of artistic production: the research university’s knowledge-making practices.¹⁵

That artistic research can perform institutional critique affirms its role within the “ruins of the university” or in HAEIs today. Butt goes further by emphasizing that the knowledge production in the arts bring the potential for upheaval in the university.¹⁶ He refers to Jacques Derrida’s lecture “The University without Condition”, where the university is a place in which nothing is beyond question, not even the form of the question itself.¹⁷

The renewal of the university through artistic research will have to exceed the world of the professoriate and connect to those in the professorial precariat, the student body, professional and service staff and all those participating in the neo-liberal university’s distributed credential factory. The freedom of the individual intellectual cannot be thought without seeking to attach it to freedom for all.¹⁸

He also remarks that what he means by a performative institutional critique can only be of “collective consideration of the institutionalization of students’ intellectual and aesthetic labor as the core of university production”.¹⁹

13 Danny Butt, *Artistic Research in the Future Academy* (Bristol: Intellect, 2017), 18, doi:10.26530/OAPEN_631388.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 19.

16 Ibid., 358–359.

17 Jacques Derrida, “The University Without Condition (1998)”, in Butt, *Artistic Research in the Future Academy*, 350.

18 Danny Butt, *Artistic Research in the Future Academy*, 350.

19 Ibid., 357.

A critical impulse of postresearch can mean a collective rethinking of the university in ruins along with artistic research as a point of condensation where institutional conflicts become visible. This is not directly obvious if we consider that artistic research is a minor field that struggles with dissemination and visibility within academic research to have gained outreach. The situation for a performative institutional critique that creates better grounds for its collective core of students is embedded in complex institutional frameworks, like the university with its supporting structures and extra-institutional associations. In what way can artistic research establish a practice of performative institutional critique? The following approach might help.

The last critical postresearch impulse I want to introduce is by Natalie Loveless. It proposes a *how to* and introduces what she calls “polydisciplinamory.”²⁰ The neologism *polydisciplinamory*, as she writes, “takes interdisciplinarity’s transgressive charge (to always be pushing at, and defamiliarizing, the limits of disciplinary boundaries) which learns from queer theory and critical pedagogy.”²¹

Loveless also criticizes the current conditions of artistic research inside the university context. She calls for action in her manifesto “How to Make Art at the End of the World” and speaks of research-creation. The term research-creation is a sister term to artistic research and is characterized by its polydisciplinamory.²²

... I look to research-creation, even as it is being commodified right under our feet, as a site of generative recrafting: a touchstone and orienting point that might help render daily life in the academy more pedagogically, politically, and affectively sustainable.²³

20 Natalie Loveless, *How to make art at the end of the world: a manifesto for research-creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 2.

21 *Ibid.*, 60. She refers to video works by the artists Deidre Logue and Allyson Mitchell.

22 *Ibid.*, 2. “(...) I attend specifically to the ways that dialogic, socially oriented, and research-based art practices are remade within the university-as-site. I begin by situating research-creation — a sister term to what is often called artistic research — within a local context, that of the Canadian university in which I currently teach.”

23 *Ibid.*, 3.

Research-creation, as she claims, is the “logical outcome of interdisciplinary, conceptual, and social justice/activist legacies in contemporary art” and can be seen as “an extension of the pedagogical turn in the arts.”²⁴ She draws on artists like Mary Kelley or Hans Haacke or extra-institutional pop-up universities like Copenhagen Free University or the School of Pan-american Unrest.²⁵ Through her research-creation manifesto, she calls the contemporary arts and extra-institutional organisations to action and is not asking for the “validity of artistic research as a legitimate form of research.”²⁶ She defines:

Traditional interdisciplinarity – with its inter theory thrust, could be said to be about *who* (which disciplines) one commits to, while research-creation, as a *polydisciplinamorous* orientation, becomes about *how* one commits to producing new kinship ties not only in terms of *content* (the “who”) but in terms of the form (the “how”).²⁷

Loveless emphasizes the history of artistic research and how a person engages in crossing mono-, and interdisciplinary concepts. A methodological character of polydisciplinamory is to be found in common with the critical posthumanities as well as queer and critical studies. Artistic research can define itself through the research-creation of a polydisciplinamorous character and revise disciplinarity and also affirm multiple research fields and its socio-political questions.

The past decades on how to define a position between art and science were dedicated to methodological introspection.²⁸

The conflicting concepts of the arts and sciences have shown on both sides discontent with forces of administration for research. Therefore, using the polydisciplinamorous character of artistic research within institutional frameworks is a critical postresearch impulse for re-starting

24 Loveless, *How to make art at the end of the world: a manifesto for research-creation*, 9.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 2–3.

27 Ibid., 63.

28 This was the topic of the 9th SAR International Conference on Artistic Research, *Artistic Research will eat itself*, University of Plymouth, April 11th–13th, 2018.

because it means engaging by making institutional critique more visible and disputable.

If artistic research can perform an institutional critique of academic research, it can also raise questions on the processes of institutionalization to reflect on. By doing this, artistic research has the potential to raise criticism of social justice, social hierarchies and exclusions, and the capacity to form collaborations that can be called postresearch practices to transform the current conditions under which research paradigms operate for the better.

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Santrauka

Posttyrimas!

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Reikšminiai žodžiai: posttyrimo sąvokos; kognityvinis kapitalizmas; institucinė kritika; *polidisciplinamorija*; meninio tyrimo ateitis.

Ar posttyrimas gali tapti kritiniu impulsu meniniam tyrimui? Diskusijos apie posttyriminę būklę drauge skatina ir diskusijas apie meninio tyrimo ateitį.

Šiandienos meninio tyrimo laukas apima platų tarpdisciplininių bei itin institucionalizuotų praktikų spektrą tiek akademinėje terpėje, tiek ir už jos ribų esančiose organizacijose. Ar posttyrimo siūlomas kritinis impulsas gali mus paskatinti atsisakyti prieštaringų šiuolaikinio meno ir mokslo sampratų bei pasiūlyti sąlygas naujai institucinei kritikai?