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INTRODUCTION

Unruly: Artistic Research between Disciplines and Becoming

Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting, the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.

BELL HOOKS 1994

This special issue of *Periskop* arrives during a pandemic, as planetary cracks deepen and social injustices, structural and systemic discriminations (racism, sexism, trans- and homophobia, ableism, classism and so on), inequalities, climate disasters, displacements, and wars continue to unsettle our present. In times like these, this special issue asks: How can we reclaim artistic research? And how are artistic research practices engaging in the co-creation of other worlds in response to different forms of social crises and planetary destruction?

We open this volume with a quote by bell hooks, from her essay “Theory as Liberatory Practice” (1994), because, similarly to how she came to theory out of an urgency to relieve pain, we are turning to artistic research as a site for creating other forms of knowledges and to carve out spaces for experiences that have previously been excluded in response to this immense destruction.

In Denmark, the discussion on artistic research has predominantly been about *what* artistic research is, and if its processes and practices can qualify as both a work of art and knowledge. With this special issue, we wish to instead ask *how* artistic research is being done and what potentials it holds for future critical practices in response to different contexts. We want to use this special issue to look backwards, forwards, and into the present, to look at the practices that currently shape the field as well as those to come. We want to “reclaim artistic research,” as Lucy Cotter (Cotter 2019) proposes—to wrest artistic research from its role in institutional policies and the transformation of art educations into third-cycle PhD-programs, and to re-interrogate its creative, transformative, and liberatory potentials. To do so, this issue compiles various voices, practices, and propositions that each draws different trajectories and avenues for artistic research as a field that is in a continuous process of becoming. Thus, this special issue of *Periskop* is an issue of artistic research *by* artist researchers, and not an issue about the artists and their work.

The unaccountable and relatively short history of artistic research in a Danish context

Before we begin, we would like to provide some context for the local scene in which this special issue will land, despite our hope that it will also resonate with wider debates around artistic research internationally. In Denmark, there has been a reluctance to incorporate artistic research on an institutional level both within the art academies as well as the universities. On the one hand, artistic research has been considered an undesirable “academicization” of the arts in the wake of the Bologna process within the European Higher Education, and on the other hand, artistic practice has been seen as oppositional to traditional disciplinary forms of research.¹ Meanwhile, art academies and art universities in other Nordic countries have been on the forefront of developing and implementing third-cycle PhD programs and artistic research since the late 1990s early 2000s (Helsinki Academy of Fine Arts since 1997 and Malmö Art Academy since 2002).² Rather than seeing this belatedness as a disadvantage, we might instead ask how we can learn from experiences elsewhere, while using this moment to imagine or reassert artistic research’s creative and liberatory potentials.

Despite the institutional pushback against artistic research in Denmark historically, artists who have worked within the Danish context are often understood outside of Denmark as being part of a larger European genealogy of fore-runners to the field of artistic research. Within that genealogy it is possible to consider French composer Pierre Schaeffer’s “Groupe de Recherche de Musique

Concrète” in the 1950s, which collaborated with Danish composer and electronic music pioneer Else Marie Pade. In addition, projects such as Asger Jorn and Jacqueline de Jong’s *Scandinavian Institute of Comparative Vandalism and Situationist Times*, and the FLUXUS movement more broadly, were hubs for practices that have informed artistic research practice.³ Seen within that trajectory, artistic research might be understood less as a straitjacket for artistic practices and rather as an acknowledgement of artistic practices’s contribution to unruly forms of knowledge that were also closely linked to forms of resistance. We mention these artists’s work here not to claim territorial legacy over artistic research, but to envisage other affinities that might not be in opposition to what we think artistic research is; artists are on the forefront of implementing and instituting artistic research practices, and this widens the scope of research rather than diminishes artistic potential. Here it is important to mention that artistic research has long traditions outside of European-North American contexts, for instance at the College of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, which has awarded PhDs in fine art since 2007, to renowned artists including Dorothy Amenuke, Ibrahim Mahama, and Bernard Akoi Jackson.

Unruly

Meanwhile, artistic research practices have emerged within academia and fought for a footing there. The special issue of the journal has taken the title “Unruly” to assert that artistic research forms *unruly knowledge(s)*: knowledge(s) that are loyal “not to power but to alterity” (Kaisen), and which inhabit the border zones between different forms of knowledges, disciplines, and sensibilities. That means practices that operate with a matrix-relationship between practice, materials, and knowing, while tying the epistemological question of what constitutes knowing in art to ontological and structural questions of who counts as a subject and an artist at all (Butler 2004). Artistic research weaves those questions together through practices to propose other forms of doing and being in the world. This “unruly” form of artistic research that we propose is indebted to many artists, thinkers, and practitioners including Adrian Piper, Trinh t. Minh-ha, Gloria Anzaldúa, Édouard Glissant, Judith Butler, bell hooks, Irit Rogoff, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to name but a few, in which the practice of critique or philosophy becomes intrinsically related to its performative and bodily inscription and practice.

With this special issue we want to acknowledge artistic practices that have worked across feminist, queer, trans, Indigenous, Black, critical race, decolonial, mad, crip, and disability studies; their intersectionalities push the boundaries and carve out spaces for practicing art otherwise. Drawing on Butler’s essay “What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue” (2004), we understand artistic research’s critical potential as posing questions to the limits of our most sure ways of knowing, while at the same time acknowledging that the limits of knowing are tied to the limits of being. Engaging in artistic research practices thus is not something we entertain because “we find it sexy” (Butler 2004)—even though it might be—but because we have run up against the ordering laws in society, or within the art scene, that govern what can be considered art and knowledge and who can be considered a subject at all. As such, performing and practicing artistic research springs from a necessity to create spaces for inserting other forms of knowledges and other forms of doing and performing those knowledges, through different materials and their textural affordances. Within that trajectory we might name artists such as Pia Arke, Susan Hinnun, Maria Finn, Kvinder på Værtshus⁴, Copenhagen Free University (Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen), Julie Edel Hardenberg, Tamar Guimares, UFO LAB (Charlotte Kim Boed, Anna Jin Hwa Borstam, Trine Mee Sook, Jane Jin Kaisen, and Jette Hye Jin Mortensen), Rikke Luther, Jeannette Ehlers and La Vaughn Belle, Michelle Eistrup, Pia Rönicke, Angela Melitopoulos, Queer Geographies (Lasse Lau and Mathias Kryger), Eva Egermann, Peter Brandt, FCNN Feminist Collective with No Name (Anita Beikpour and Dina El Kaisy Friemuth), and Staying with the Struggle (Barly Tshibanda, Nanna Katrine Hansen, and Nanna Dahler), to name but a few⁵, who have all been pushing the boundaries for inserting room for other ways of knowing and practicing art in and out of a Danish context.

Becoming

Artistic research as an unruly field is dependent on the objects and the practices it produces, and its objects and practices in turn will come to define it. Artistic research as an unruly discipline or practice is in a constant process of becoming. Throughout this special issue, artistic research is not about submitting artistic practice to already existing disciplines and formats within academia, nor about retreating to a life outside of those frames. Rather, artistic research can open up a pluralization of methods and knowledges—which questions the very limits that govern our most sure ways of knowing, but also governs who counts as a subject at all—and proposes new ways of being in the world in an entanglement with materials. As such, artistic research enters into a process of “becoming”. As

Rogoff suggests, research “is actually the thing itself, the event and the process of becoming.” Evoking the Deleuzian-Guattarian notion of becoming, Rogoff aims to disrupt the telos of research as a natural progression, and instead proposes an understanding of research as the “disruptive relationship between the discrete elements of the assemblage. In becoming one element of the assemblage is drawn into the other piece changing its value, and bringing about a new unity” (Rogoff 2019).

With this special issue, we want to suggest that artistic research practices offer spaces and practices where material and bodily (with “body” understood in the widest possible way to include the non-human) experiences are entangled, forming assemblages and new practices which produce forms of critical inquiry. As such, artistic research offers an unruly entanglement, between material, technological, affective, and sensuous experimental forms that do not always offer themselves as legible. In addition, artistic research offers a space to value the “minor over the major, the neglected, difficult and the opaque over the transparent and easily accommodated” (Cotter 2019, 17). While conventional forms of scholarship can be said to have desired transparency and accountability, we find it useful to draw on Martinican philosopher and poet Édouard Glissant’s notion of “opacity” as an ethos for artistic research. In *Poetics of Relation* (2010), Glissant theorizes opacity specifically through the prism of the coloniality in Martinique, which does not necessarily render it translatable to other fields and contexts, yet “the right to opacity” is interesting to consider in relation to artistic research, as it insists on an unknowability—and, hence, a poetics of relations, for Glissant. In a multirelational world, recognizing difference does not mean understanding otherness by making it transparent, but accepting unintelligibility, impenetrability, and confusion rather than striving for legibility.

Yet this ethos also requires that as we are instituting artistic research, we must constantly ask, what other forms of knowledges/subjects are being left out, what are the blind spots that we are producing?

Artistic research as collectivities / artist run

Finally, with this special issue we want to suggest that artistic research is artist run and can open up to forming new collectivities to come. As Rogoff suggests, research in the arts “has moved from being a contextual activity that grounds production and exhibition of art, to a mode of inhabiting the art world in its own right” (Rogoff 2019). Artistic research not only proposes new forms of being an artist and knowing in the world, but also requires us to form new collectivities, new communities, and different platforms through which those knowledges can

be shared, experienced, and disseminated; as such, the other impetuous of the artist researcher is to set up the parameters that one (or one's community) wishes to be "read" or encountered in. As the "conditions" (2019) that we as artists and researchers are working within are daily impacted by precarity, sustainability, security, financialisation, pandemics, social injustices, structural and systemic discriminations (racism, sexism, trans- and homophobia, ableism, classism and so on), inequalities, climate disasters, displacement and wars, these conditions necessarily force us to remould and reimagine the very institutional frameworks that we are producing and are being produced within. For examples of collectivities, see Primer-Diakron, Sorte Firkant, Metro Al Madina, Khartoum Contemporary Art Center, VISCO: Virgin Islands Studies Collective, Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art, Study Circle in Artistic Research-Nordic Summer University, Month of Performance Art-Berlin, MoKS, and Grüntaler⁹-a space towards the performative, (to mention but a few).

About this special issue

This special issue differs from earlier issues of *Periskop* in that most contributions are written in English, though some are in Danish and Greenlandic, as we chose to share the call internationally. It is our hope that the issue will resonate with larger discussions internationally, as well as locally. The formats of the contributions also differ from previous issues because the practitioners, individually or collaboratively, have submitted works in different formats, including essays, visual art- or performance-based works, performative writing, visual-essays, and conversations. Despite the various formats of the contributions, most of them have been peer-reviewed (those contributions are listed as peer-reviewed below). The peer-review system is often perceived as a standardization of artistic and scholarly work within academia (Bal 2018), but in this issue it was done with the aim of providing peer feedback in constructive ways. It is our hope that the different formats and practices also form different sensibilities for conveying knowledges otherwise and carve out spaces for imagination and conversations to come.

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NOTES

- 1 It is important to note here that the art education in Denmark is under the Ministry of Culture, while the universities are under the Ministry of Higher Education and Science. In 2011, “artistic development work” (Kunstnerisk Udviklingsvirksomhed), was acknowledged and incorporated within arts education. In 2019, the International Center for Knowledge in the Arts, housed at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, was established to support the development of research in the arts in Denmark.
- 2 In the *SHARE Handbook for Artistic Research Education*, they identify “Six cultures of the PhD” incl. “the Continental-, the Nordic-, the UK-, The Japanese-, The Chinese- & The North American model” (Ruiten and Wilson 2013).
- 3 This genealogy is partly inspired by a talk by Florian Cramer, at the conference Poesis & Precision: Forum on Non-trivial Relations between the Arts, Design & Sciences, organised by Siegfried Zielinski, Westbund, Shanghai 2019.
- 4 Kvinder på Værtshus (Women Down the Pub, Denmark, since 1997) is a group of visual artists. Current and former members include Nanna Debois Buhl, Andrea Creutz, Nynne Haugaard, Sofie Hesselholdt, Vibeke Mejlvang, Christina Prip, Kirstine Roepstorff, Katya Sander, Marika Seidler, Åsa Sonjasdotter and Lisa Strömbeck. The group collaborates on issues of gender politics, representation and language.
- 5 Acknowledging that naming is always a practice of exclusion and there are many voices and names that we have not been able to include here or that have been overlooked.

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