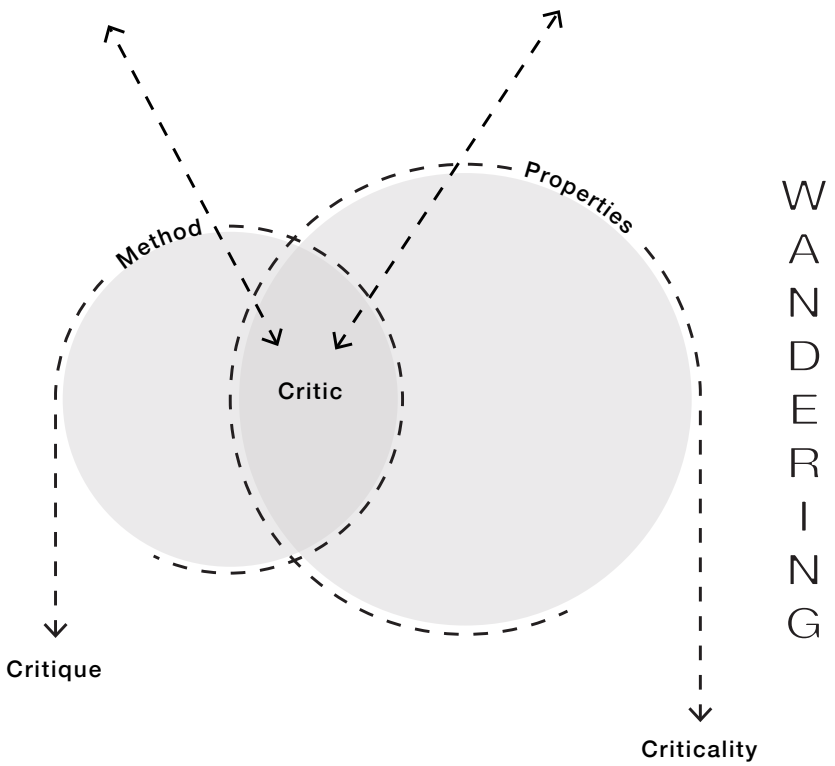
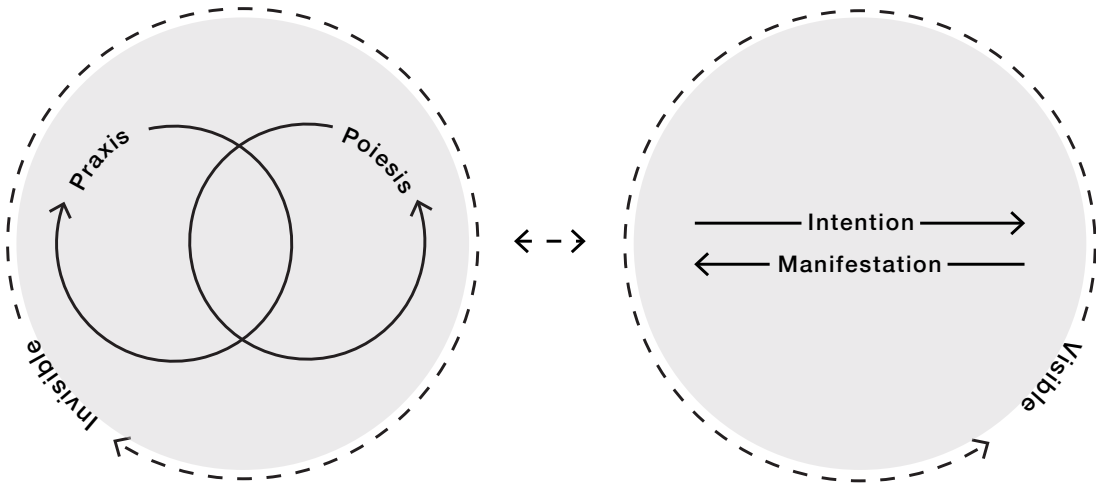


*Art practice* ----->



-----> *Art practice doing*

# Diagrammatic art doing

I've made the diagram on the opposite page as an attempt at unfolding the idea of *artistic practice* and to try to come closer to some suggestions of what it consists of. The two words *artistic practice* are the most commonly used pairing when we describe what we do as artists, and they are assumed to encompass all aspects of an artist's work. Artistic practice is what we try to develop when we go to art school, what we describe when we write artist statements, what we talk about when we do artist talks, and so on. But to some degree it can also be viewed as a way of referring, or as a motor for a certain language that is for the initiated; maybe more pressingly, it might be one of those phrases that we have become so accustomed to using that it obscures its actual content and meaning. Because what is it we do when we do what we do?

When I use *unfolding* to describe what the diagram sets out to do, it is with a nod towards a traditional deconstructive method. The idea is to break apart, unveil, or destroy and (re-)construct practice so that the components are uncovered, and to explore if these exist independently of individualised artistic practices. If so, they can serve to develop a language about the potential artistic generalities in practice independent of medium, theme, or expression; as such, they might strengthen our conception and understanding of art working.

I've chosen the diagram format because it can show some of the invisible and rather abstract dynamics that play a part in artistic practices. At the same time, a diagram is something that places itself between image and text, and thus might help to illustrate and activate other ways of thinking and understanding practice. As with any other diagram, this diagram consists of shapes, lines, colours, and words, which help illustrate relations, dynamics, differences, and similarities. The circle is the primary geometrical shape in the diagram, because I think there is an intuitive understanding of the circle as a figure in motion, and this suggests that there are dynamic exchanges and simultaneous movements going on between the elements. Everything can happen at once. At the same time, the lines of the circles also demarcate an inner space and an outer world, and this emphasises a relation we constantly navigate in an oscillation between intimate proximity and radical exposure.

The main exchange the diagram tries to illustrate is the transition from art practice to art ~~practice~~ doing. “Art practice” in the top left corner is followed by a dotted line ending in the bottom right corner where it says “Art ~~practice~~ doing.” The crossing out of the word but letting it be present is a deconstructive tool. The crossed out word—the word that doesn’t suffice anymore—remains present, but the suggestion of a new word creates a deferral of semantic meaning. The content and meaning lies somewhere in-between. Here “art” is paradoxically redundant, it is merely the denominator for the field we are working within. The actual tension is between *practice* and *doing*. Doing is linked to practice, or more precisely praxis, because there is an etymological link between practice and praxis where both words can be understood in the sense of acting. Practice is commonly paired with theory—implying that theory relates to speculative thinking or the idea, and practice relates to the practical, the actual, and the concrete execution of that idea. But practice in the sense of praxis should not only be interpreted as dictated by theory, as instrumental for theory, or merely as a forward-moving process to meet a specific goal. In *The Man without Content*, Giorgio Agamben traces the development and genealogy of “man’s doing”—man’s productive activity. In the development through history and especially with the transition from Greek to Latin linguistic domination, man’s doing lost some nuances. In his analysis of the Greek understanding, there are several modes of doing. Praxis is one mode which entails a willful act that creates an effect and poesis is another mode of doing where something goes from non-being to being—an ontological and creative mode (Agamben 1999, 151).

I have used this distinction between modes of doing in the first circle on the top of the page. This is to suggest that the processes of artistic doing consist of several modes, or what could perhaps also be recalled paces or energies, and that these oscillate between states of being and states of producing, immaterial and material, poetic and causal.

At the same time we also need to relate to the fact that in contemporary art doing we are very conscious about producing *something*, making something visible. It is, so to speak, part of the game that artworks (of every possible kind and materialization) need to come out. This also means that processes often start with an already defined purpose, i.e. to do an artwork, meet a deadline, produce for an exhibition (or write numerous applications with descriptions of projects that will never materialise because of lack of funding). All of this can be described as part of a willful act, and this act begins with an intention. This willful or intentional act can probably also be less conscious, not necessarily a completely verbalized or recognised (cognitively) intention, but an urge to do something, an opening. The second circle illustrates that in this space and these modes of doing, there is an interaction between the intention of

doing or expressing something and the manifestation of that intention. How do I do what I want to do—how do I express *what* I want to express?

To sum up there is a correlation between two modes of art doing, praxis and poiesis, and a more purpose-driven dynamic between intention and manifestation of the intention. These two spaces illustrated in the top two circles overlap and interrelate in a more or less disorganised way. To be able to navigate in this disorganisation, a critical apparatus is needed (the word critic or critical in this context should not be mistaken for fault-finding). That critical apparatus appears in the bottom two circles. There I make a distinction between critique as method and criticality as properties. Critique as method can be understood as the foundation that artistic doing is based on, a sort of procedure or approach tied to the reflexivity of intention and manifestation, praxis and poiesis. Critique is here tied to a philosophical conception that seeks to explore the possibilities and limitations for the method, thus creating a framework for the doing. This can both be understood as a consistent artistic method or as a method that changes from time to time. But overall it deals with how the intention can manifest itself in a suitable way.

If critique is the *how*, criticality—understood as properties or qualities—is the *what*. It is what you explore and want to say something about. This can to some extent be understood thematically or subject-based but criticality is dependent on critique. A critical methodology filters the exploration of situations, thematics, discourses, theories, and concepts, etc., in a way that both holds a potential of showing a distinctive artistic gesture or style and making the criticality itself present more vividly. In this sense, critique is more static and criticality is more dynamic, but there is an ongoing negotiation and overlap between the method and the properties. In this overlap, the figure of the critic appears and is defined by making use of both a critical methodology and of critical properties. This suggestion consequently makes the artist a critic of sorts. A critic that asks and answers through a doing that is decidedly artistic in a contemporary sense with its interdisciplinary responsiveness, way of questioning and manifesting, and without wanting to fill an expected function. Edward Said describes the critic as a wanderer “going from place to place for his material, but remaining a man essentially between homes” (Said 1985, 8). This in-betweenness of the wanderer is also applicable in this context.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- 1 Agamben, Giorgio. 1999. *The Man Without Content*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 2 Said, Edward. 1985. *Beginnings – intention and method*. New York: Columbia University Press.