

KAPITEL 1

Exposition Writing

By Michael Schwab

The *Journal for Artistic Research (JAR)* refers to its contents as ‘research expositions’ (Schwab 2011) rather than ‘journal articles’. This is to highlight the fact that an article published in *JAR* need not follow standard conventions associated with academic writing (cf. Gillett 2010), which have made it difficult for artists to publish their research appropriately and, in turn, led to a writing culture far removed from practice – the site of research. One of the purposes of *JAR* is thus ‘to bring writing nearer to our making,’ a demand voiced by Katy MacLeod and Lin Holdridge in their introduction to *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research* (MacLeod & Holdridge 2006, p. 12).

The demand has two major implications. The first, which this article will mention but not discuss, is epistemological: it may be that introducing artistic research into academia proper not only extends what we think we can know, but also challenges *how* we think we can know (cf. Knorr Cetina 1999, p. 1; Schwab 2012a, p. 242), questioning the lazy form/content

relationship characterising the whole of what, today, is called the ‘knowledge economy’. In short, while the coarse resolution offered by formalised knowledge works pragmatically, insofar as machines can be built and resources exploited, it fails to reach the material reality of things that require a ‘practice turn’ (cf. Knorr Cetina et al. 2000), which ‘mode 2’ knowledge production (Gibbons et al. 1994; Borgdorff 2008) may approach but perhaps fails to reach (Münch 2011, p. 89 et seq.). Arguably, reality projected through our ‘knowledge economy’ may increasingly have become fictive — a state of affairs already lamented by Martin Heidegger (2003 [1938]).

At the same time, what is meant to be fictitious — art — may have built not ontological (as Heidegger would have it) but epistemological inroads into reality, at least into those parts of reality that matter. Developing an epistemology of art from within art’s *episteme* may challenge more effectively than a simple belief in Art the dominant dependence on propositionally fixed identities and reveal options, political or otherwise, that we regularly choose to ignore. However, even if we do not go to such extremes, a journal like *JAR* raises the question of writing in relation not only to art but also to knowledge. This is because it places itself and, with it, artistic research firmly in the academic tradition of writing. For this reason, the concept of ‘research expositions’ adds to the present

debate in the sciences and ICT concerning enhanced publications (cf. Woutersen-Windhouver et al. 2009; Schwab 2012b). Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasised that, conceptually, expositions are not limited to journals and may include performative or other presentations that are not usually seen as ‘writing’. This leads to the second major question concerning ‘research expositions’: how to write them. I will focus on *JAR*, but following the points made above, there may be wider ramifications.

Many artists consider that, for knowledge implications to be activated, their work must be experienced. Its specificity and material presence, and the context in which it is experienced, are all seen as crucial to its meaning. Although the question of whether artefacts ‘embody’ knowledge is difficult if not impossible to answer (Scrivener 2002; Biggs 2004; Candy & Edmonds 2011), it would surely be a mistake to exclude them from consideration. This seems, however, to apply precisely to the vast majority of works published in academia. For Bruno Latour, as the ‘world’ enters language locality, particularity, materiality, multiplicity and continuity is lost while comparability, standardisation, text, calculation, circulation and relative universality is gained (Latour 1999, p. 71). For art, one may argue, this trade-off is less promising, if not impossible, since along the way art may lose those essential parts of its meaning that cannot be successfully transformed into such language.

It may also be argued that appropriate modes of writing that allow art to become comparable, standardised etc. have not yet been developed. While this may be true, it seems more likely that the overall emphasis on formalisation has disadvantaged contemporary art that — since its embrace of post-conceptualism during the 1970s — challenges such tendencies. At the same time, it is clear that an online journal cannot mediate the kinds of experience that can be achieved when works of art are originally encountered, be it paintings in a museum, dance performances on a stage or architecture in the built environment — if they are not conceived as writing, that is.

Returning to Latour (1999, p. 69), one may claim that the gap we perceive between art and text does not cause the problem of research but, rather, results from an operation that Jacques Derrida calls ‘arche-writing’ (Derrida 1997, p. 60), which creates the gap in the first place. Art, then, represents not the ‘eternal Other’ to writing, but *in* writing. Although at this stage of my intellectual life I am convinced on this point, it is crucial both for my personal approach to art-making and for *JAR*’s position in the field that such understanding should not be generalised. This is not only because it appears to be unprovable, but because making ‘artistic research’ dependent on a limited definition of art has also been one of the chief failures of the discourse to date.

FIRST- AND SECOND-ORDER ART-MAKING

It is better to argue that there may be (1) a certain type of first-order art-making, before writing, on which writing may reflect, but which is quite independent of it, and (2) a certain type of second-order art-making (cf. Schwab 2008; Schwab 2009a) as the result of a writing process. Crucially, I claim no *formal* difference between the two. Rather, I argue that any artistic practice may be regarded as art of *both* the first and second order, giving scope to the radical negativity and ongoing claim to autonomy that first-order contemporary art has inherited from Modernism and Late Romanticism. Albeit indirectly, upholding the position of radical negativity is also vital to second-order art-making, which — being the result of a writing process — is held back from claiming autonomy. If we did not assume the possibility of first-order art being distinct from second-order art and independent of writing, we would severely curtail the originary power of arche-writing. Arche-writing can be categorised as such only if it disappears from the first-order art and writing that it produces. In other words, second-order art-making needs the possibility of first-order art without ever being fully able to reach the claim of a negativity and autonomy that only first-order art can afford. Consequently, second-order art-making utilises neither a different nor a minor form, as the history or theory of art might

suggest. The fact that we think an ontological difference between it and first-order art must exist is due to the radical construction of the latter — it *has to be* different to be the first.

Let us return to the more practical question of the publication of artistic research in a peer-reviewed academic journal. First-order art-making cannot fall within the journal's remit, since there is always something essential missing (the original work or experience) that no transcription can convey. Thus, from the proof provided (the submission) no adequate understanding can be achieved, since elements essential to the meaning of the work will be missing. Not only can the submission then not be sufficiently understood; more importantly, it cannot be understood as *artistic* research. This is because, from evidence that refers the claim to the original site of experience outside the submission, the sense in which such art may count as research cannot be known.¹ Thus, regrettably, due to these epistemological problems, it is difficult to get art regarded as being first-order presented in *JAR*. This points to a serious problem for the academic field of artistic research in general: other than in the humanities and sciences, counting peer-reviewed works published in journals does not suffice to represent the quality of the work done in art academies. Journals such as *JAR* cannot be the missing link required to include art in the existing assessment of research that increasingly

relies on peer-reviewed journal publications for ranking and funding purposes (Münch 2011, p. 133 et seq.).

Furthermore, if there is a form of highly developed first-order art-making that cannot be, and perhaps does not seek to be, research, it is pointless to declare it as research in order to fit it into the 'third cycle' of art education. If a third artistic, non-research degree is required for professional purposes, let us devise it rather than stretching what 'research' might entail until it becomes unrecognisable. Research degrees need to be awards given to excellent artists who make their art relevant to knowledge generation through their very specific, second-order practice.

What I have said so far is necessary to protect both first- and second-order art-making and to be quite specific about the types of artistic engagement that a journal like *JAR* can support. Above, I characterise second-order art-making as the making of art that is seen to stem from original writing. Such an approach to art-making may not be recognisable as writing, but writing is implied — negatively or positively — in this practice and can be extended into its publication in an online journal. Crucially, other than in the first-order case discussed above, the essential experience is not left behind as the writing starts. Rather, the experience is in a practice of writing that may not look like text but which may be unfolded

into one. I do not, however, suggest that the experience to be had along with such unfolding processes of writing is invariably the same or even similar. I only suggest that qualities essential to the research are kept alive across those transformations. Latour appears to agree with this suggestion: 'It seems that reference is not simply the act of pointing or a way of keeping, on the outside, some material guarantee for the truth of a statement; rather it is our way of keeping something constant through a series of transformations' (Latour 1999, p. 58).

RESEARCH EXPOSITIONS IN JAR

Publication in *JAR* is not the representation of a practice, but rather a practice transformed through the medium of the journal. If the transformative chain is kept intact, a reader should be able to reconstruct from its transformation elements of that practice that are essential to the epistemological claim that is made. The transformation that comes with the 'writing' of the 'article' *exposes practice as research*² and develops an epistemological claim within an artistic idea. Crucially, following the route of second-order art-making, the exposition of research does not start with the 'writing' of an 'article' but has invariably already started with the making of the work. There is thus no difference between a *JAR* exposition and an artwork *in terms of artistic practice*³ — both are modes in which a given

practice unfolds. This in turn has major implications for the characterisation of 'writing' in *JAR*, the technological infrastructure used by the journal (the RC) and its peer-review process.

First of all, let us be clear: with its RC, *JAR* offers a 'technical support' (Krauss 2006) that in part determines how practice is exposed as research. Although the developers of the RC have done what they can to integrate the various media, including text, into what may be called a 'rich media application', it remains confined to the fairly limited technical framework of browser technologies and computer screens. Something similar may be said of any other technical support: canvases may have size limitations, galleries may be in the wrong end of town and concert hall acoustics may be horrible. Artists have always worked with such limitations. This does not mean, however, that one should be complacent about the *JAR*/RC technology. If the technical support it offers impacts negatively on the work to be carried out, artists may — rightly — walk away, just as they do in 'real life' when confronted with an impossible situation. Although many resources were put into developing the RC through the Society for Artistic Research (SAR) and the Artistic Research Catalogue (ARC) project,⁴ exactly how the community of artistic researchers will embrace the framework remains open. Arguably, more important than the technical support that the RC offers is the question of

whether and how it can be seen as an artistic platform for a second-order approach to art-making as discussed above. If *JAR* is an artistic medium, it can never dictate its own supposed use. As the history of art has taught us, there cannot be any formal criteria for artistic practice; rather, any contribution to *JAR*, just like any work of art, needs to be allowed to mobilise what is deemed important to make its artistic epistemological case.

From my short experience of submissions in *JAR*, I venture to say that in many cases the customary theory/practice divide that is ingrained in art education recurs and appears to be more of a problem than the RC's technical limits. Thus, time and again, *JAR*'s editors discuss with researchers what other options they might have, challenging them to reimagine their practice in the context of *JAR*. This is a learning process for all involved since as *JAR* is developed, so too is the concept of 'exposition'. What often seems *not* to work is the reuse of existing material. In the case of artworks, these are often documentations of the kind used in exhibition catalogues or on DVDs. Such documents very often illustrate what the artwork is but are seldom used to open up epistemological implications. Different modes of documentation, however, require different visions and a fair amount of extra labour. Incidentally, questioning the representational limits of documentation is a theme in contemporary art (cf.

Cramerotti 2010), and it is surprising that representational strategies that are often critiqued in relation to the politics of vision are so readily applied to the representation of people's own artistic work. Before all else, research expositions need to work out *how* the link with a reality outside the journal page is made, rather than relying on in-built truth mechanisms. Often, this problem of documentation parallels the reuse of texts written for a different purpose, which are meant to explain practice rather than to expose it as research. Although these texts may be highly skilled, their context is more often in philosophy, cultural studies, art history and the like and less often in the specific practice at hand. This reflects a dominant approach in art education where criticality is brought to the work from the outside rather than being developed within it.

Positively put, successful research expositions negotiate the gap between practice and theory by exposing the epistemological potential of a practice, thus making real the theory enacted in it. This process may simply be called 'thinking' (cf. Gasché 2007). *JAR* has no preferred format for such thinking. The exposition may consist of a simple text or video, a collage of media files or the navigation through an archive. The reading may be linear, circular or hypertextual. It may cause confusion by using multiple voices, involve no speaking at all or put into words what nobody else has

said before. The only general advice to be given is that it has to work, i.e. convince an audience that practice is unfolded as research and that the exposition is of interest or relevance. Interestingly (to follow the above definition of second-order art-making through arche-writing), if successful, this process both yields an experience of art in the pages of *JAR* and delivers understanding. Frameworks for artistic research, such as *JAR* or other initiatives, add new artistic options to practice. It may, in turn, be said that for artists like myself who require these options, the development of such frameworks is essential. To me, developing and editing *JAR* is part of my artistic activity, because it transforms what I can do as an artist.

Referenser och litteraturförteckningar

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Fotnotes

1. This pragmatic approach works for the *Journal for Artistic Research* since, being a journal, it is removed from this site of experience. It naturally

- comes to a head when first-order art-making needs to be assessed as research in an examination, for example. Either the work, the exhibition, the performance, supporting material or other devices etc. are used to create a site of writing or what is presented may not be assessed as research. It may be appreciated as art and it may humble everybody who is lucky enough to experience it, but this appreciation may not be in relation to an epistemological claim. This is precisely Socrates’ problem in the famous *Book X of The Republic* where he lacks the arguments to follow his heart (Plato 2003, 275d; Schwab 2008; Schwab 2009b).
2. The term ‘to expose as’ is less important than the doubling it entails. Depending on practice and discipline, terms like ‘to stage as’, ‘to perform as’, ‘to translate as’, ‘to reflect as’, ‘to curate as’ or ‘to unfold as’ are equally valid. It should, however, be clear that the doubling alluded to is artistic in nature.
 3. The attentive reader may realise that I stop short of calling research expositions ‘artworks’. This would not be necessary for an exclusively artistic discussion. However, since the presence of artworks may be seen as having one foot in the art market, I deem it better to not imply anything in this direction. Despite this, research expositions clearly have one foot in the knowledge market. Hopes of research automatically being market-critical need to be kept at bay.
 4. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all ARC project partners and SAR members for their support and to advertise SAR membership. Please go to <http://www.jar-online.net/> for more information.