

„Nothing has been changed . . . except the words“
Opening address to Florian Dombois' exhibition *Galleria del Vento*
Venice, July 8, 2017

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Dear attendees, guests, by-passers, dear colleagues

„The closer you look at a word, the stranger/the more distant it looks back / Je näher man ein Wort anschaut, desto ferner schaut es zurück“ – Karl Kraus said that, a well-known Austrian writer and clairvoyant observer of his time, one hundred years ago.

„The closer you look at a word, the stranger/the more distant it looks back“ – „Artistic Research“ for example. Or, the beautiful German word *Probe*. A word, not really translatable into English. *Probe* includes a bunch of very different, even contradictory layers of meaning. It means, in no particular order:

- 1 A test – the litmus test for example
- 2 An attempt - probier es! Try it! Try it out!
- 3 An experiment
- 4 An example – a Musterprobe for example, an example of a piece of fabric
- 5 A performance - in different art disciplines: in fine arts, in dance, in theatre
- 6 A Rehearsal – in theatre or of an orchestra

And, there are is a wide range of stunning metaphoric figures of speech in German like „probieren geht über studieren“, translated into English in a very different, nevertheless also very impressive metaphor: „the proof of the pudding is in the eating, or „jemanden oder etwas auf die Probe stellen“ = to put someone or something to the touch, or „die Nagelprobe machen“ = to make the acid test, and to finish this little compilation: „den Aufstand proben“ = to mobilise or to try to rebel. Which does not mean you have a rehearsal, but you are acting, performing the rebellion.

When I talked with Florian about his *Galleria del Vento* project here in Venice some weeks ago, he mentioned the word *Probe*, he just had come across recently by opportunity, to be adequate for what he as an artist, is going to do here in Venice

(and may be beyond). But I do not know whether he was aware of the manifold meanings of the word or term *Probe* he was happy with to describe his practice for *Galleria del Vento*.

For me the whole ensemble of these manifold and intertwined layers of meanings of PROBE their condensation into this one word, very precisely describe or name what Florian and his crew are going to do in July here in Venice (and maybe beyond).

The triadic basis of this art research is not laid open but becomes obvious, as soon as one has a closer look at it: an *experimental system* (to use Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's term or an *experimental dispositif* as I would call it), one's own *experiences* and *experiments* as an artist (to use the two enigmatic elements, on which for Gaston Bachelard all research practice is based on). What Florian Dombois is going to practice for a full month with *Galleria del Vento* - with stamina, abundant curiosity, earnestness and waggishness - is a modest and a radical way of art research at the same time: the practices, processes and results of this research are not only assertedly but indeed *ergebnisoffen*, open-ended. Which means: the project may fail partly or even completely – but what does failing then will mean? –, it may be highly successful wholly or partly, in ways not to know yet, or it may produce and effect a *mischmasch*, a *salmagundi* of flotsam and jetsam, of *Plunder* (in German) or *bullshit* (in English), and of novelties: new *Erkenntnisse* or (new, different) “aesthetic thinking” - a notion Florian has emphasized in recent times to avoid the institutional and political constraints and the negative effects of the meanwhile heavy-loaded term “Artistic Research”. We, the audience and participants, are invited to look at, to look out, to look for and to experience what will happen. It promises to be interesting.

At this stage, Please, allow me to spend some minutes for a side note: these *dispositif* and procedures are very common in fundamental Science, at least in fundamental Science that deserves its name: when you start your research, you have a sometimes vague, sometimes bizarre, sometimes ostensible or not obvious idea that there is something out there that may be interesting to research. In sciences, it happens that by coincidence (or by a strategic decision) there are ten research projects dealing with the same topic starting at the same time. In nine of ten cases the research - that may last for months, years or sometimes even decades – fail, this is the rule. But, failing research projects are a condition and a part of the successfulness and ‘progress’ of research. This is valid in any specific research field. The tricky thing is, you do not know at the beginning, which one of the projects will be the successful one and you do not know at the beginning, whether brilliant researchers have also been part of the failing projects. You will find out only afterwards and then, hopefully, draw your conclusions. Of course, there is one big difference between Art Research and research in Science: there is much more

money at hand in Sciences, for obvious reasons. Which means amongst other things, Sciences can afford more easily to fail to ninety percent.

Now, let's return to the main issue here and today: I will not talk about the many-layered and thoroughly thought of contents and formats of Florian Dombois' project *Galleria del Vento* here in Venice – a wind tunnel to be produced by the daily collected flotsam and jetsam of the Venice lagoon, I will not talk about winds and boats and sails (golden ones and other ones) as the fundamentals of Venice's – by the way: Europe's longest-living empire ever! - richness (and also its decline, when different winds, boats and sails on different seas – the Atlantic Ocean - became more important), I will not talk about Sala del Camino, the hot spot of the event, to be a windtunnel itself (as soon as you open its windows, you will notice), I will not talk about the empty, invisible and blind centre of every windtunnel, I will not talk about the hardship and joy about sun, rain and storm while loitering and sailing around in the lagoon of Venice nor of the tracking of these trips, I will not talk about winds of change, nor about blowing in the wind, nor about the wind that cries Mary or winds that hit heavy on the borderline, and, eventually, also not about Bert Brecht's well-known *Seeräuber-Jenny-Ballade* "Und das Schiff mit acht Segeln / Und mit fünfzig Kanonen / Wird entschwinden mit mir". The name of Venice, Veniza - "Veni etiam!" - I am sure you know, means literally: come once more / return again! And, finally, I will not talk about the series of palavers – a highly powerful but highly neglected or negativised format - Florian has set up to make thinking about, sharing ideas of and disputing Art Research more productively, in a relaxed and concentrated atmosphere at once. I will not talk about all of this, even if all of these traces, histories and strata are underlying currents of Florian Dombois' and his crew's crusade as well as of the whole under-taking, the *Probe Galleria del Vento* - consciously or unconsciously.

I will only point to Florian Dombois' modest, humble and radical practice of Art Research as one and its effects, his attempt to overcome the secure paths of artistic research without leaving behind the embers, the fervour, that is at stake and in pace with the times with this different but still young type of research.

[I quote]:

"This is a song about a boxer

It's got nothing to do with boxing, it's just a song about a boxer.

It's not even having to do with a boxer, really

it's got nothing to do with nothing

But I threw all these words together, that's all

This is taken out of the newspapers.

Nothing has been changed, except (for) the words." End of quotation.

What is this about? On first glance this talking is playfully fooling around with words, somehow charming, quite bizarre, somehow ironic, not really understandable, maybe hinting or aiming at a critique of language.

On a second glance Bob Dylan's comment at the beginning of his Song „Who killed Davey Moore /why an' what's the reason for?“ in a series of concerts 1964 marked a new aesthetic attitude, a new aesthetic programme in a nutshell – mentioned en passant, but changing things forever.

The song mirrors or interprets morally or moralistically only at first glance a reality that exists outside of itself – as a double fact: the 'real' fact of the dead of the boxer, and the real newspaper fact. In its core substance, it is something radically different, something that goes against the grain, as a counter-narration: the song is a construction of a reality of its own, a construction that asserts and claims art to be a reality of its own, and to insist on art that has a societal impact of its own by its own means. And, the song offers and demands a new, so far unknown or only little accepted kind of perceiving the world to be caught by the audience.

Florian Dombois' *Galleria del Vento* is a research project - eine *Probe*, as I tried to sketch out - through, by, about, transgressing, transforming and beyond artistic research.

I semi-quote:

“This is eine *Probe* about Artistic Research

It's got nothing to do with doing Artistic Research, it's just eine *Probe* about Artistic Research.

It's not even having to do with Artistic Research, really

it's got nothing to do with nothing

But I threw all these words together, that's all

This is taken out of some books and journals (of artistic research).

Nothing has been changed, except the words." End of semi-quotation.

Die Probe, which Florian Dombois, here in Venice, presents, experiments, experiences with, attempts, performs, rehearses and humbly offers to us, the audience - as a contre-bande, and with Schweijkian understatement -, is but insisting on and performing art and art research – a notion more and more he is reluctant about and he has replaced by “aesthetic thinking” (*ästhetisches Denken*) for the moment - as autonomy, as a practice of qualities, as *Eigensinn*, as logics of its own – with respect to science, the humanities and to the arts and even to artistic research. With obstinate (*eigensinnige*) hunch, hope and faith that there is something out there in the Venetian lagoon worthwhile to deal with, and that something is going to happen out there and in here in Sala del Camino, even if you don't know, what it is,

~~Mr. Jones.~~ This under-taking includes and runs the risk with one's eyes open to fail completely, as mentioned before. Nothing more, nothing less, it is that simple. About the unforeseeable artefacts and effects coming out of this art research under-taking we will hear about, „darüber wird zu reden sein“. There will be dialogue, discussion, and – hopefully - dispute. In the palavers and after July, when l'évènement, the event, of die Probe will have happened.

To come to an end without ending, I would like to thank

- Helsinki University of the Arts and our Norwegian and Swedish colleagues for their generosity, hospitality and readiness for taking risks to invite Zurich University of the Arts, ZHdK, to be a partner at this year's Research Pavilion and to offer the opportunity to make *Galleria del Vento* happen. Thanks for this.
- I would like to thank you, the audience here and now, for listening and for trying to at least: catch some or to make sense out of my ideas and, last but not least,
- I thank Florian and his crew for having brought their winds of change here to Venice.

It only remains for me to wish "Mast- und Schotbruch!" or, for English ears: "Always fair winds and following seas!" to Florian's curious, taking risks and open-ended crusades in the lagoons of Venice and here in Sala del Camino.

Finally, and this really is the end here, there is postscript:

Thursday, two days ago, the European Research Council (ERC) celebrated its 10th anniversary at CERN in Geneva. I had the privilege to have been invited and to have taken part in the celebration. Reinhilde Veugelers, member of the ERC Scientific Council, and Jean Pierre-Bourguignon, President of ERC, made very clear that "Frontier Research", research that takes risks, that looks for, invents and follows unknown and even "crazy" paths, research that aims for novelty not for innovation, is the research which is at stake and in pace with the times. And therefore, this kind of Research has been declared *the* strategic aim of the ERC for the decade to come.

Florian's and his crew's *Galleria del Vento* is very much in accordance with the distinct and pointed position of the ERC. Even if the ERC couldn't and surely wouldn't have in mind this kind of research. But, the time will come, ERC will or will have to support such kind of research - if they take for serious their own strategic goals and aims.