

Artistic Research: A Tool of Cognition Parallel to Philosophy?

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Let us take a look at a piece of art photography. It shows a female person. Her gaze is striking, her brows are slightly knit. Her eyes are fixed on something outside of the depicted scene. The woman is seen at an angle from below; she is dressed in neat urban business attire. Turned to her side she is looking at that something outside of the picture and that introduces a mood of anxiety to the bright urban scene. Precisely framed, the person is standing in front of a backdrop of high-rise buildings, perhaps in New York City, perhaps in downtown Chicago; she is positioned harmonically in the two-thirds section of the picture frame and she is gazing to the side of the camera as if it didn't exist. Nothing in this image, in this gaze, in this pose, this attire, this backdrop, or this lighting seems to be coincidental: It is staged like a movie still. Indeed, it is the staged reproduction of an image that could be a film still and thus the depicted person seems to be embodying a role.

The gaze of the viewer of this image is a knowing one once it focuses on this picture. Observing is not done by simple viewing, by pre-reflective perception or a pure sensoric act. The role and movie character of the image becomes perceivable and it is recognized on the basis of thousands of prior experiences. We are experienced in our contemporary visual culture and we are privy to the aesthetic codes of this ostentatious mimic: The uncertainty of the slightly opened mouth, the attentivity of the fixed gaze, the unexpected and elusive anxiety of the scene. No sudden shock, no fear of the horrible, more an anxiety in the face of everyday reality. A nervous, fixating looking up reminiscent of a flight animal. The psychology of the visually articulated habitus turns the image into a social diagnosis and it turns the role into the positioning of a subject. It appears as if everything in this image is a detailed and precise composition of statements on the

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assumption that the viewer is in possession of that prior knowledge and that visual literacy that makes him an understanding eyewitness.

The photographic image of the neatly dressed, attentively gazing woman is part of the series entitled *Complete Untitled Film Stills* by Cindy Sherman.¹ This photographic work in black-and-white, realized between 1977 and 1980, consists of 69 individual images. One after another, these pictures show a female person in differing poses, scenes, and subject positionings. The person by the kitchen sink, behind the salt dispenser, and in front of the frying pans is a different photographic image, a different role, a different subject positioning. Her pushup brassiere impresses patterns in her viscose silk blouse. In front of this patterned bosom, her arm is propped to the side on the rim of the sink, as to protect the presented object from view. At about the same height as the rim of the sink, her other arm is pressing against her ruche apron and thus into her belly to give her composure. Her head is lowered slightly to the side. In this kitchen sink scene, her protruding lower lip and her eyes fixed upward indicate submission as well as an invitation to move in closer. And again, her gaze is fixed on something outside of the visible scene. This something positions the person in her pose.

In all these photos, Cindy Sherman, the artist, stages herself according to the aesthetic patterns of movie scenes. One and the same artist individual takes on differing roles that can be deciphered as female prototypes. Sherman approaches these roles mimetically and she seems to be absorbed in them photographically. Her protagonists are actresses, presented, however, not heroically as central figures but as somewhat damaged and somehow irritated or as at the fringe of the action. Even though, one after the other is staged and she is positioned as a subject: Half naked, in an antique pose in front of the bathroom mirror, checking out her own physique. In another one, the look on her face is telling that she was caught in the act of reading someone else's mail. Or she is draped on the bedspread. Or she is in a hotel room, lonely and in despair. In yet another image she is seen sitting at the bar in a tiger skin blouse, tears streaming over her face and dissolving her make-up, smoking in front of a cocktail glass. One shows

¹ Cf. Cindy Sherman, *The Complete Untitled Film Stills*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2003.

her standing on a country road in the light of car beams, dressed in a long skirt and with a suitcase next to her, threatening dark clouds in the sky. In another one she is lying on the couch lasciviously with a drink. And there is one showing her reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe, the collar of her coat turned up as to protect her from snow and photographers' strobe lights.

The serial character of Sherman's work can be perceived as dealing in a researching way with the staging and situating of the female subject on the movie set. "Perceiving" here is to be understood as "comprehending truth by seeing", as comprehending the medial "truth" of the subject's position by seeing it. The series *Complete Untitled Film Stills* runs through each new subject positioning as through a performance, the identically same, albeit changeable, artist individual remaining perceivable as the source material for the staging. In her works, Sherman researches the topic of subject positionings, staged and conveyed by cinematographic means, but she does so not by including scientific or academic texts or data. She rather researches by producing images and serially re-staging movie standards of the female self, her methods being trial and error, variation, and reflections of movie art. This research by way of serial images, in its formal articulation, is by no means a matter of coincidence. Sherman produces photographic images, because her artistic research interest lies in the media staging of female subject positioning. Her artistic way of articulating herself corresponds to her choice of topic. Form is not an end in itself here. Sherman is a conceptual artist. She works with ideas and topics and she finds her way of expressing herself artistically in the correlation between form and content.

In the course of the historical development of concept art, topics have become of increasing importance in the visual arts. Creative artists identify with conceptual questions, not with media of expression; thus Cindy Sherman is not seen as a photographer, but as a topic-oriented artist who is dealing with the role of females in the media and who is looking at identity constructs. As a result of dealing with thematic questions, the artist's practices themselves are reflected in art and thus are considered as methods of researching these questions. Culturally creative people like Sherman probe the medium of their artistic production and the form of their methodically reflected artistic expression for answers to their conceptual questions: The serial nature of her work makes it possible for Sherman,

in the style of movie series, to go through the positionings of the subject in the film in all variations and to compare them with one another. In her visual medium, Sherman refers to the world of media pictures in their formal correspondence relationship. The artistic medium photography reflects the cinematographic medium film where the subject is scenically positioned. By using film stills, thus photographically stopping the flow of film sequences, Sherman is able to devote a contemplative kind of attention to the otherwise elusive, motion-oriented film medium. Photography is to film what analysis is to a chemical solution: It disassembles the constant flow of film motion into separate moments and conserves the sequences, to make perceivable which subject positionings are shown in them. In this way, the photographic series *Complete Untitled Film Stills* reveals two aspects of an artistic position that can be discussed as visual research: For one thing, the intensive work by the artist on a topic of social relevance, that of the visual film culture. For another thing, the methodological consequences for the praxis of artistic work arising from this accent on conceptuality, that is the photographic and the serial elements. With her photographic and serial praxis, Sherman researches her field productively by way of generating images, as we can now state tentatively, and in this way she makes a methodological contribution to an understanding of our visually oriented contemporary times. The question emanating from that, however, is what it means to grant the status of visual research to this artistic praxis. To put it in generally terms, what in art can be seen as visual research?

I. What Is Artistic Research?

A certain irritation intensifies the debate on artistic praxis as research and it gives this debate an epistemological drive that delves into the basic concepts of what research is: It is irritating that, again and again, there is indignation in the established sciences when an artistic praxis is treated as a kind of research. What happens to the claim of something being scientific, is the question posed, if perception in and by art advances to the status of research? Where is the difference between scientific methodology and subjective opinion once artistic praxis is accepted as research? Perhaps these reservations express simplistic notions about what artistic praxis,

academic education in the arts, or contemporary art can be. Mere perception? Subjective opinions? Above all, however, they give expression to a conflict on the question what research is supposed to be about and who decides on that question. The contemporary indignation about art being able to make a contribution to research does remind one in a certain way of the situation in the seventeenth century when methods of natural sciences began to establish themselves as “research,” while traditional philosophy continued for a long time to hold on to the notion that the experiments of the natural sciences were nothing else but plain observations or that the use of mathematics was mere figurework. Neither experiments nor mathematics, the philosophers claimed back then, were capable of capturing the essence of things. The philosophers’ goal was to grasp the ontological essence of things, not their calculable behavior. As we know from history, the methods of the natural sciences were able to gain acceptance as research. In basic terms, however, this shift to the methodology of the natural sciences also changed the claims on what cognition is all about — its goal was no longer ontological essence but rather nomological behavior. Thus, at the basis of the historical indignation there was a struggle for a new definition of the fundamental direction of epistemology. And what is today’s debate about? From our contemporary perspective and against this historical backdrop of an epistemological trench warfare between the humanities and the natural sciences as well as in view of the long tradition of methodological research, epistemology, and science theory, one might have been able to expect that there would be a certain kind of sensitivity about what is or is not recognized *en passant* as “research”. But far from that kind of sensitivity, today we seem to be dealing once more with a case of knowledge politicking. This knowledge politicking considers and channels what may be considered as “research practice” and what cognition is all about. If artistic research is now the subject of deliberation and if the debate is on the question whether it is to be included in the canon of scientific practices, then this questions stand at the bottom of it all: Who decides what research is? And: What kind of cognition are we aiming at?

Perhaps it is still too early, in view of the marginal role played by research in the field of art, to pay too much attention to these epistemological battles and mechanisms of strategic exclusion. The politics of knowledge expressed by the indignation about artistic research, on the other

hand, does point out that it should be relevant to define more precisely what the methodological aspect of art is and what type of cognition it addresses. In comparison to the long tradition of methodological reflection in the humanities and natural sciences, artistic research still has a somewhat unsolicitous stand. An epistemology of artistic research seems to be a necessity, because often even experts in the practice of art follow the predominant indignation and, in debates of a somewhat bizarre nature, define the arts as being pre-reflexive or subjective, granting them not more than an implicit kind of knowledge as opposed to the explicit knowledge attested to the sciences. Once in these dire straits, there is a tendency to try to salvage the practice of art by declaring it to be a “particular kind of research” or a “different type.” It seems that this is a salvation nobody needs.

Let us look at some examples. The journal on artistic research *maHKUZine*² discusses the point that artists work as individuals and it calls for a certain social competence on the part of those persons working as creative artists who claim to make a contribution to research with their artistic praxis. Why, is my question, do the authors of this journal for artistic research stipulate practices here which are known as “scientific” from other, non-artistic disciplines? Individual research becomes a problem only if one feels called upon to imitate research methods from the natural and social sciences that are organized for group work in laboratory situations. Embedded in the contexts of exhibitions and of cultural discussion processes, artistic work may be individual, but certainly is not isolated. If one focuses this comparative view on artistic and other kinds of research in a different direction, the entire problem becomes non-existent. People engaged in the cultural sciences or in philosophy are individual workers, just like artists, and their research flows into monographic works which, as books in the context of a theoretical debate, are comparable with art works in the field of exhibitions. This being so, the idea of artistic research does not necessarily contradict the artistic claim of creating unique works, as, for instance, Schippers and Flenady claim in the anthology *Kunst und künstlerische Forschung*³ (*Art and Artistic Research*). The aspects of individ-

² *maHKUZine: Journal of Artistic Research* is published at the Art Academy in Utrecht, Netherlands (<http://www.mahku.nl>).

³ Cf. Schippers/Flenady, “Schönheit oder Vernunft,” in: *Kunst und künstlerische*

uality and uniqueness in the practice of art cannot be a fundamental problem when compared with the work methods in the humanities and social sciences. At this point, however, *maHKUZine: Journal of Artistic Research* postulates, with a view to the research practices in the cultural and social sciences, that artistic work would need to be put into writing in order to become comprehensible as research. If you look at the research practices in the natural sciences, though, do the mathematical formulae you find there in abundance need to be translated in texts? The formula character of numerical cognition requires of the reader — a reader who, as in the case of art, is more of a viewer here — a specific, non-conceptual competence in order to be intersubjectively comprehensible. Why, then, cannot this kind of a “reading competence” specific to a particular methodology also be required in terms of art works, when the point is to understand their aesthetic regularities, their history, and their reference system between different works?

These examples clarify two things: The first is that the point cannot be to turn the practice of art into research by merely imitating recognized methods of science, because practices, methods, symbolic communication media, and horizons of understanding do differ from one discipline to another. The second is that, even though, the point would be to identify principles of research specific to art, because, until now, it has been undefined what the methodologically unique character of the praxis of artistic research is. Formal claims to intersubjective reproducibility and immanent conclusiveness cannot be the lone basis of specific research practices or of a transfer from one discipline to another one. If art were as experimental as the natural sciences, it would be a natural science and if it were as conceptual as the social sciences or humanities, it would be a social science or humanity. What, then, is its method, its medium, its basis of operation? Merely and vaguely pointing toward the aspect of art which is “different,” non-conceptual, enigmatic, or illogical does not satisfy the claims of research, understood as a comprehensible path toward knowledge (Greek: *methodos*). The practice of art, however, ought to be deciphered as a comprehensible path toward knowledge.

What can be the path toward knowledge in the field of art? What me-

Forschung, Zürich, 2010, p. 90.

dia of communication and which subjects will have to meet which criteria for which forms of cognition? In finding answers to these fundamental questions, let us begin with the epistemological aspect. This epistemological beginning emanates from singular and particular activities in the practice of art in order to examine their methodological qualities. What we are looking at is not the result of artistic praxis as knowledge or cognition, as opinion or insight, neither is it a general assessment of all forms of art as media of research; it rather is the singular activities in the practice of art so that we become able to judge the methodological potential of these concrete practices. If we were to claim *a priori* that art is a medium of cognition, we would overlook that, in fact, only specific practices of particular art forms could be considered to be research. These specific practices of art gain relevance as research, because they are methodologically comprehensible and — that is also significant — because they deal with questions that are methodologically troublesome to the traditional scientific disciplines. In the same vein as speculative philosophy struggled methodologically with nature and the physical world in the era of early modernity, where the research practices of the natural sciences offered themselves as tools for finding new answers to these problems, art practices offer themselves as research in contemporary times where the natural sciences and the humanities are struggling methodologically with the visual culture and the public world of images. The new dominance exerted by the visual culture is calling for new methods of reflection. This competence in dealing with the visual culture is being developed by artistic practices working visually in the world of images. Thus, our epistemological attention in diagnosing artistic research is particularly directed to that form of art which is working with images. Within this visual art, those visual art practices are becoming worth discussing that are conceptually reflected and that thus seem methodologically sound and comprehensible. In this context, Cindy Sherman's artistic work is of exemplary significance for an epistemological understanding of visual art as research, because it systematically analyzes visual culture by using the means of image production and of serial methods. Sherman's, to be sure, is not the only position in art working in this thematic field and Sherman is not the only one who directs formal and conceptual attention to the practices and strategies of art production as phases of dealing with an artistic question.

II. Methods of Visual Praxis

Thus, let us return to the concrete visual practices of the arts. We are standing in front of a video installation. The heads of thirty different persons can be seen, each on one of thirty monitor screens that are mounted on the wall to form the shape of a very large monitor. A muted polyphonic hum begins to attract our attention. The individual persons on the monitors begin to move, entering into the rhythm of their singing. For the viewer, these motions and the humming sounds combine into a — synchronous as well as dissonant — overall picture of the individuals between their harmonic approximation and their idiosyncratic deviation relative to the commonality of the song they all are singing. We do not hear music, lonely the hum and the singing of the persons on the monitors. They, however, appear to be hearing music to which they are singing. Much like an underlying latent symphony in whose sound waves they find their rhythm, this non-present background music characterizes the aesthetic mood. We see how different persons on their monitors bob their heads and begin to writhe their arms and hands. The singing rises and they end up, almost in unison, to warble and belt out all 73 minutes and thirty seconds of the entire album *Immaculate Collection* by pop music diva Madonna, thus forming the installation entitled *Queen* by the artist Candice Breitz.⁴

This work of Breitz deals with the topic of pop culture in its two-way relationship with the individual. In this video installation, it is not the artist herself, as was the case in the photographic works by Cindy Sherman, who probes media culture with her own body. *Queen* is an artwork where fans of Madonna appear on the screens who are medially transformed into their idol's position. These fans sing Madonna, dance Madonna, and they place themselves into their star's role. In their approximation to the ideal, an irritating blend of succeeding and failing becomes visible and audible, forming a choir of "almost-similars." Breitz includes in her art works "experts in everyday life," as one could put it. The fans are art amateurs, but they are experts in the field of pop music and pop culture. They are familiar with all the lyrics of Madonna's songs, the order in which the songs are arranged on her albums, the gestures and rhythms of Madonna's live performances. They know the characteristics of Madonna as a pop mu-

⁴ Cf. <http://www.candicebreitz.net/> (June, 2010).

sic figure through the imaginary relationship they, as fans, have built up with their idol. This expertise they have in the everyday pop culture is habitually set to stage in Breitz's art work when the fans stage themselves in front of the studio camera impersonating Madonna. In the course of following her research interest, Breitz does not rely on intuition or inspiration as an artistic individual, but rather engages in a performative and image producing kind of social research. She invites experts to take on the place of their idol, thus "illuminating" their knowledge about this idol and their relationship to her. The test of her artistic working hypothesis about the relationship between the popular idol figure and individual self-performance takes place in the course of this cooperative artistic effort in the phase of visually arranging the artistic thesis. Breitz's thesis about the performative relationship between self-image and pop culture is continually tested in the process of artistic production by the cooperation with the participating individuals. Or, put in a different way: Breitz's questions directed at pop culture are visually and performatively answered in the art production process.

As the artist Cindy Sherman researches cinematographic movie works, Candice Breitz deals with the visual and performative aspects of pop culture, developing systematic methods of artistically coming to grips with it. As does Sherman, Breitz also treats the topic of the effect of the medium on the individual in a serial work method. Next to her work with Madonna, Breitz also produced a video installation, entitled *King*, featuring pop star Michael Jackson; Bob Marley is the topic of her work *Legend* and John Lennon is the idol in her work, entitled *Working Class Hero*. All four of these art projects were realized between 2005 and 2006 using the same experimental setup with different fans. Bob Marley's album *Legend* is restaged by impassionate Marley fans, Jackson fans sing and pose the album *Thriller*, and fans of John Lennon reproduce in habitual reference to the original the album *Plastic Ono Band*. These works of art by Breitz form an "ongoing survey," as a curator's description of the installations notes, researching the mechanisms of projection, identification, and consumption which characterize the relationship between the idol figure and his or her fandom. The serial focus of the artistic praxis on certain topics makes a thematic research interest visible. This research interest in certain topics brings about that the visual art of Sherman and Breitz can be understood not

only as a medium of representation, but as a medium of visual reflection.

Breitz's and Sherman's artistic research is conceptually focused on topics and that leads us to a context of meaning which connects their media of reflection with their object of research. The media of their art works, as staged photographs or video documentations, reflect the topics of their artistic work. It is of epistemological relevance here that popular pictures and art images come together in the medium of visibility. On the basis of this medial correlation, visual art researches visual culture as its topic. Sherman's photo series or Breitz's video installations mirror the image character of the visual culture in artistic images. A visual art which reflects visual culture in the medium of image generation, presenting its thematic field of interest in a serial way, devotes itself to a comprehensible examination of its topic — it does research.

Indeed, the concept of artistic research, as it has come into use in the visual arts for some time now, does call attention to a tendency whereby art is not conceived in terms of the finished art work — following work-oriented aesthetics — but rather is essentially conceived in terms of the practices and strategies of the artistic production — following production-oriented aesthetics. The process where a work of art comes into being moves into the center of attention; the artists perceive this process as a methodological phase of researching and developing an artwork. Along with this shift in art history from the finished art work to the artistic process goes a change in the self-understanding of art itself. It becomes more development-oriented, experimental, questioning, communicative, cooperative, and responsive to that social reality whose topics become those with which artists deal. In addition, art often openly shows the process of its production. Thus, it is of methodological relevance that Breitz, in her video installations, reveals the genesis of the art work as part of that very work. She openly discloses the experimental structure of her artistic research. While viewing her video installations, the fans become perceivable as autodidacts, thus making perceivable the conditions under which Breitz produced the art works, her way with them and to them. The fans who are her artistic co-workers, as experts in pop culture and at the same time as everyday amateurs, do not appear in camouflage but rather openly as those who they are. Breitz's artistic praxis is not only comprehensible because it presents her artistic production partners as staged pop stars;

the artist also documents the cooperation phase as part of her art work: In the internet, in exhibition catalogues, and in other publications, the works *Legend*, *Queen*, *King*, or *Working Class Hero* are shown not only as video installations, but the fans involved can also be seen working on the artistic product. These “backstage” pictures are part of the entire staging of the art work, just as backstage pictures of Madonna or other pop music stars are part of the staging of their particular pop myth. In Breitz’s work, these picture documents mainly serve as information for the viewer on the cooperative method of the artistic work and as sources of her artistic statement. By this method Breitz’s praxis of art makes itself examinable, responding to the viewer’s need for comprehensibility. It shows its experimental structure and explicates its arguments as process of artistic production.

III. Iconic Exercises

Let us now look finally at a film episode: Three young protagonists are roaming around an urban waste land. Surrounded by city buildings they climb on rubbish mounds, overgrown with goldenrod and young birch trees. The habitus of the three on the waste land is aimless, but not contemplative like a strolling flaneur. Like discoverers and collectors they comb through the high weeds and enter derelict buildings. In a large hall the sunlight comes in through the dilapidated roof and creates graphical patterns on the concrete floor strewn with broken glass. The young protagonists stop and look in amazement. They want to make this scenic spot that looks so empty and barren into their place: “What if this would be a bar now!” and then they spread out over the entire space. Documentary footage and staged sequences blend together in the movie now: Tables and chairs appear, there is music to be heard, drinks are there ready to be enjoyed, and by way of film they occupy this space, unused as it is in this urban waste. The discoverer-like way the protagonists deal with the urban space and waste appears like a land-grab. Hesitant and yet cool, conscious of their cinematographic self-staging, they wanted to utilize what they had discovered and they wished, beyond all unanswered questions of ownership, that there should be nomadic bars in the ruins or public film viewings on the waste land. This positioning of the urban subject as a wayward

individual is continually reflected throughout the staging of the film: Not only do tables appear in ruins, but gardens start growing on the waste land and movies are projected on firewalls. This film episode blends and combines both documentary shootings of devastated urban landscapes and the self-staging of young persons as protagonists of land appropriation.

The individual experiences with one's own city are structured by contemporary film culture — that is the conceptual working hypothesis of this art project which I realized in Leipzig in 2004 and 2005. What effect do cinematographic patterns have on the parameters of perception of individuals and how do urban subjects move as “actors” in their own environment? The piece I have described is part of a series of art projects on “self-images”, entitled *Stadt. (City)*; the general motive of this series is the question what the interface between individual self-images and public role models is like. The basic methodological characteristic of the series is the cooperative way of working. As in Breitz's works, the artist's position in the art projects on “Self-Images” is embedded in the cooperation with experts on everyday life. In contrast to the fans in Breitz's art project, who were asked to approximate a pre-defined ideal, my partners of cooperation in the “Self-Images” project, however, developed their medial frame of reference themselves. In *Stadt.*, they bring out the visual references for their urban self-image on their own, making reference to different movie genres. “What is one's own medial framing?” is the underlying research question and, “How can we visualize our own urban environment by way of this medial framing?” In the imagination of our young protagonists, their appropriation of urban wasteland becomes a film somewhere between the “Western” and “Outlaw” movie genres. *Stadt.* is comparative visual research. Each film sequence was developed, arranged, shot and edited in cooperation with the protagonists involved. In the course of artistically staging the movie, these experts on inner-city everyday life reassess their relationship with the city and with the film genre. By way of their performance they relate themselves to the public picture cosmos and, thus, they make comprehensible in what way they, as individuals, move in urban space within the patterns of this medium.

The cooperative method of artistic research always means interfering with the participants' self-image. Through the iconic exercise of relating oneself to visual culture by way of staging one's own appearance, the in-

dividual involved makes visible that subtle process of “setting oneself in a relationship with...”, visible for himself but also for others. As was the case with Cindy Breitz’s art work, in this work, too, the information about the production conditions played a constitutive role for the framework of perception in which the art project can be seen as research of visual urban culture. The protagonists appear in the film episodes staged and yet amateurishly clumsy. Their presence generates displeasure with the imperfection of the staging which reveals the urban subject as an arranged figure and documents his hankering for the ideal. The artistic research led to a staged documentation that claims to narrate reality as a staged production.

Through the production of the film, the cooperative partners in this visual research project themselves become producers of visual culture who generate public images. When it is shown in the city’s cinemas, the art work not only interferes with the self-images of those involved in its production, but also with the visual urban everyday reality which it claims to be researching. In the cinema it becomes part of the medial world which it tries to reflect on aesthetically. This interference of art with the visual culture that it researches goes beyond the merely reflexive status of research as such. Works of art whose presentation mode relies not only on the interior space of art but actually enters the media world — that is, art works in public space or, as they say, “in the public interest” — carry visual research into the realm of visibility, making it subject to public debate. Thus, this praxis of art intervenes with the world of media pictures which it researches and it becomes part of the visual landscape which is its conceptual topic.

IV. On the Epistemology of Visual Research

One thing all the examples we have looked at have in common — as trite as it may be for the visual arts, but not banal at all for research in visual culture — is their characteristic of generating images and thus of being visually reflective. This visual art becomes relevant for researching visual culture, because in the image medium it reflects the picture world of visual culture. It creates reflexive images by twisting and turning visual culture

by way of visual and performative techniques, thus analyzing its effects. In the process of this visual reflection, the praxis of art is productive as its research consists of generating images. Visual research not only does its reflecting within the medium of imagery, but it also enlarges visual culture in the research process. As conceptual research not only researches the discursive culture but also carries it a step further, as experimental research not only discovers the material world but also develops it, in the same vein visual research not only reflects the visual culture but also molds it. Visuality as a cultural phenomenon has its researching equivalent in the image generating practices of visual art.

We can use the serial character of art work groups to distill from all three examples we have cited the methodological processuality of the practice of art. The serial character does not derive from the medium of artistic research, its aspect of consisting of images, but from its methodical organization. The serial production of art is similar to a chain of arguments that shows the research topic in different aspects by looking at it from different perspectives. Serial visual art strings its statements together like a chain of visual pieces of evidence. The method of serializing is not the only research method within the imagery of visual art. The practice of cooperation is a further method. In the research process, cooperative methods, which do not rely on the artistic subject as their sole source of creative work but deal with their topic by including experts on everyday life or other research partners, intervene with the object of analysis and change it in a reflexive way. Those participating in visual research go through a communicative process that clarifies their own relationship with the world of public images. Further than that, presenting artistic research as an art work in the world of public media turns the result of the visual reflection into a part of visual culture. Through their reflective contribution, an art movie shown in cinemas or a picture series available as a photo book in any bookstore enlarge the existing world of public images. Thus, working on art, as a cooperative practice and by its public presentation, can acquire an interventionist character, interfering with the aesthetics of everyday life that it researches and with the world of public images. Visual art here researches the visual culture and at the same time it also is visual culture, which means that within the medium of imagery it researches itself as culture and continually establishes itself as culture. The divide between the

process of research and its object is being undermined and, at the same time, reflected within the framework of art. In the course of the research, this process of undermining reveals that the researchers are embedded in the visual world which they claim to be revealing.

In this way, artistic research, in its serial, image generating, and cooperative methods, underscores the process character of its researching, the productive character of the manner it generates cognition, and the interventionist character of its research as a practice of public reflection. The concept of artistic research can designate those particular forms of art which understand the artist's own work as an artistic examination of the contemporary visual culture; they do so by working artistically with the contemporary visual media and by reflecting the aesthetics of everyday life through the processual, productive, and cooperative character of their media and methods. Artistic, theoretical, and experimental research can be seen as an ensemble of cultural practices which in different ways contribute to the self-understanding of individuals as well as of society in our visual, conceptual, and material culture. Artistic, theoretical, and experimental research methods turn out to be synchronous, but not identical tools to treat and present different cultural realities and make them debatable and perceivable. Further than that, visual artistic research seems to have the potential to inspire the other disciplines to be aware of their own productive and perhaps even interventionist character. The cheerful production of images through artistic research makes the relationship between public images, art images, and self-images appear to be much more of a mixed bag than the differentiation between object, subject, and effect — considered to be a benchmark of “science” — normally suggests.