ART PRACTICE
as
RESEARCH

helma sawatzky
Leonard Da Vinci  (April 15, 1452 – May 2, 1519)
1. Virgin and Child with the Infant John the Baptist and St. Anne
2. Flying Machine
3. Madonna and Child with St. Anne
4. Study of Proportions, from Vitruvius’s De Architectura
5. Mona Lisa / La Gioconda
6. Studies of Embryos
what
when
where
why
how
is art?
the matter of
the Masterpiece
Diego Velázquez
Las Meninas
1656
Oil on canvas
318 cm x 276 cm
the issue of

the Artist
Marcel Duchamp (1887 - 1968)
ARTIST STATEMENT

With Plunger I follow in the footsteps of French artist Marcel Duchamp, whose gesture of the *readymade* rocked the art world at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This work, like Duchamp’s readymades, is a “manufactured object raised to the dignity of work of art through the choice of the artist” (Iversen 45) and shakes up many of the expectations that surround a “conventional” work of art:

- It required no craftsmanship or skill of the artist in the medium of choice.
- It is a factory made, massproduced item, and thereby does not qualify as unique or precious art object.
- It bears no “unique artistic fingerprint” nor does it seek to be a personal expressive gesture on the part of the artist (47).
- It does not seek to express some aesthetic value
- The object is essentially indifferent

* Duchamp liked to cite T.S. Elliot: “The more perfect the artist, the more separate in him will be the man who suffers and the man who creates” (48)

As the concept of the readymade has lost most of its power to shock, we find ourselves looking at an object of the artist’s choice and do often discover “a strange new beauty” (48).

British artist Tony Cragg stresses the need to discover the poetry, literature, and romance of the plastic objects as a way to create meaning in a consumerist society that has deprived people of their own past. The approach of the readymade could be one of the ways in which we can create new emotional or aesthetic content for objects which otherwise go unnoticed (Art Ache).
the ‘conceptual turn’

the idea

rules
Conceptual art - art that looks a lot like research
This is not a work of art
Question:
Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon’s Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?

Answer:
If ‘yes’ please cast your ballot into the left box; if ‘no’ into the right box.
Mary Kelly
Post Partum Document
1976

(ein 3 6) E IS FOR ELEPHANT. He calls it the "curvy one" and pronounces it "eek." He often forgets it and sometimes writes it upside down, "A." When he sees an E, he present or a breast, he says, "this is that," something at once lost, forgotten, remembered again, and then the "e" as in the "E IS FOR ALLagogRAPHS ENTERTAINING ELEPHANTS. E IS FOR AN EAGLE ON AN ELEPHANT IN AN EGG AND SPOON RACE. GOOD NIGHT EDWARD ELMER ELEPHANT. GOOD NIGHT LITTLE E.

February 1977: I noticed the general conditions here, then the children this morning. It was rubbish outside the building and the dust inside. When I walked through the room the boy looked so many of them did in blankly at me. In the heat they mean, it isn't their own place. It's only rented during the war from a boy who hasn't a playground and the children have to stay indoors. All but about 30 hims of the 2 hrs. is "unstructured" and seems to get out of hand. I'm afraid they'll get hurt. I can't spend the bad weather after about an hour of it. I don't believe it could be so unfair and precocious, I feel inadequate myself because I can't offer any better. I wish she could help. Perhaps it is a good thing that the Department of Social Services has not visited this place.
art as research
Olafur Eliasson
The weather project
2003

Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London
Olafur Eliasson
New York Waterfalls
2008

VIDEO
http://www.nycwaterfalls.org/#/Olafur_Eliasson/Interview_With_Olafur
art as

- site for aesthetic pleasure
- self expression
- educational tool
- discursive object
- research data
- research process
research

into through as for

art
WHY PURSUE ART WITHIN A RESEARCH PARADIGM?

• Pragmatic reasons
• Financial reasons
• Epistemological reasons
• Cultural-contextual reasons
A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME?

- Creative inquiry
- Practice as research
- Practice-led research
- Practice-based research
- Art practice as research
- Art as research
- Artistic research
- A/r/t/oigraphy
“Practice led research is a distinctive feature of the research activity conducted by arts and humanities researchers, it involves the identification of research questions and problems, but the research methods, contexts and outputs then involve a significant focus on creative practice. This type of research thus aims, through creativity and practice, to illuminate or bring about new knowledge and understanding, and it results in outputs that may not be text-based, but rather a performance (music, dance, drama), design, film, or exhibition.”

(UK Arts and Humanities Research Board, 2003, p. 10)
“Art practice is a way of researching through the practice of making art. Such making is not just doing, but it is a complex informed physical, theoretical and intellectual activity where private and public worlds meet. Art practice is the outcome of intertwined objective, subjective, rational and intuitive processes. Considered this way, art is a discipline, informed by the conceptual and linguistic conventions of its culture and history.”

(Thomas, 2007, p. 81, as cited in Sullivan, 2010, p. 78)
“Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes. Art research begins by addressing questions that are pertinent in the research context and in the art world. Researchers employ experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes. Research processes and outcomes are documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner to the research community and to the wider public.”

(Borgdorff, 2006, p. 23, as cited in Sullivan, 2010, p. 79)
CONSTRUCTING A DISCIPLINE:
CREATING A PRACTICE LED RESEARCH PARADIGM
J.L. Austin’s notion of performativity: “Performative speech acts are utterances that accomplish, by their very annunciation, an action that generates effects”

VISUAL ARTS PRACTICE constitutes a hybrid ‘third space’ in which particular practices meet on different terms in a different context to create potential for different ways of knowing.

A TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGM

AGENCY

INTERPRETIVIST PRACTICES
Dialectical
Constructivist
Inter-disciplinary

EMPIRICIST PRACTICES
Conceptual
Reflective
Discipline-based

VISUAL ARTS PRACTICES
Create and critique
Reflexive
Post-discipline

CRITICAL PRACTICES
Critical
Collaborative
Trans-discipline

STRUCTURE

ACTION

Sullivan, Graeme. (2010).
Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts
Sage Publications (p. 102-107)
MEANING DIMENSION

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INTERPRETIVIST PRACTICES
- Dialectical
- Constructivist
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EXPLANATORY DIMENSION

STRUCTURE

EMPIRICIST PRACTICES
- Conceptual
- Reflective
- Discipline-based

DIALECTICAL METHOD

DECONSTRUCTIVE METHOD

Sullivan, Graeme. (2010).
Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts
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CONSTRUCTING A DISCIPLINE:
IMAGINING DISCURSIVE ORBITS
THINKING THROUGH ART
VISUAL KNOWING
TACIT & SITUATED KNOWLEDGES
AUTHOR FUNCTION
EXEGESIS AS MEME
DESCRIBE EXPLORE DISCOVER
SELF REFLEXIVITY
PROCESS & PERFORMATIVITY
MATERIAL THINKING
TRANS | MULTI
CROSS | INTER
DISCIPLINARITY
TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH
ETHICS OF INVENTION
ETHICS OF INVENTION
THOUGHTS ON THEORY

EXPLANATORY THEORIES: Why? What is?
• causal explanations / predictive power

DESCRIPTIVE THEORIES: What?
• identifying relevant factors, components, systems

INTERPRETIVE THEORIES: How?
• draw together information into syntheses

PHILOSOPHICAL/PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORIES: What might be?
• conjectural by nature, use deliberative methods

CONTEXTUAL THEORIES: What was? What was not?
• may serve historical, ideological, political ends

(Sullivan, 2010, p. 105)
CONSTRUCTING A DISCIPLINE: METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN
A SAMPLE OF ESTABLISHED & EMERGING METHODS

- Visual cultural archeology
- Collage
- Technology-based visual methods (e.g. Photovoice, photo/video elicitation)
- Exegesis of art-making process
- Visual phenomenology
- Philosophical inquiry / thinking through art
A STRATEGY FOR PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH (Barrett, 2007)

1. **Staging the research:**
   - Poses the research question/problem
   - Outlines background | States aims / hypothesis | Outlines approach

2. **Literature & practice review**
   - Locates research in field of theory / identify gap in knowledge
   - Locates research in field of practice/ discuss related work

3. **Identify methods, conceptual frameworks, materials**
   - Provides rationale | Outlines what was done to answer question
   - Describes studio process and its significant moments

4. **Exegesis: Discussion of the studio art-making process**
   - Analysis and interpretation of the body of work or artefact that emerged in relation to the research question/hypothesis/thesis

5. **Discussion of outcomes and significance**
   - Articulates broader application of findings
   - Reiterates value of practice as production of knowledge
Who is the artist?

What is the art?

What is the research?

How is it evaluated?
Who is the artist?

• A ‘practicing artist’ who uses his/her art practice as a vehicle for inquiry and knowledge development
• A participant in a research study
• A social scientist who uses art as an alternative form for visualizing research findings or as a vehicle for discussion
• A student making art in a context of learning

What is the art?

• Artwork produced and evaluated by artist-researchers (Issue: this claims a credibility and quality through its context of production).
• Artwork created by participants in research settings that use artistic inquiry as a form of data collection.
• When is art meaningful? To who? Where, when, why & how?

What is the research?

• The process of creating work, i.e., how we come to know the world
• A critical engagement with or evaluation of visual arts
• The exploration of the experiences of research subjects using visual methods (e.g. using photography or video / crossdisciplinary approaches)

How is it evaluated?

• Through a process of selfreflexivity and exegesis in the form of academic writing
• In the context of an exhibition - and acts of curation by a ‘third party’ (other than the artist)
• As a form of qualitative data for analysis by the social scientist
UP FOR CONTINUED DEBATE...

- The making/writing issue
- The particular/general issue
- The use of theory:
  What theory and to what end?
- Critical judgment:
  What is good art in the context of research?
- Art’s outcomes are always ‘a posteriori’:
  Meanings are made ‘after the event,’
  through the act of viewing and contemplation.