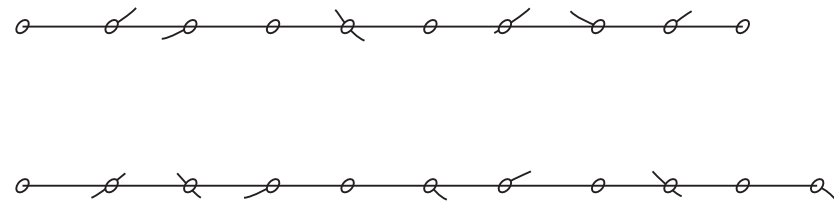


## ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ARTISTIC RESEARCH AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE

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The core of the current discussion about artistic research lies in so-called research *in art*,<sup>1</sup> where the border between research and artistic practice no longer seems to be clear. Despite comprehensive analyses the debate has not arrived at a suitable definition. When artists declare their work to be research,<sup>2</sup> a certain skepticism remains. Other forms of artistic research—*for* and *about art*—tie in with already existing research traditions and can be more easily distinguished from artistic practice, and yet still await their own precise definition in exactly the same way. With this lack of decisiveness, artistic research runs the risk of becoming a mystery that can be both everything and nothing, and thus not taken seriously. Does the adjective “artistic” mean an essentially new kind of research or simply a new area of research? Is the difficulty of keeping the formerly clearly demarcated fields of science and art apart a sign that the previously valid categories of appropriation of the world [*Weltaneignung*] are entering a critical phase and looking for a new definition? Or is it a sign of the dangers of a way of thinking that overlooks essential differences in the hope for new possibilities by dissolving borders, with the result that we are no longer capable of differentiating the basics? Is the difference between science and art really disappearing?

This discussion has two aspects: one ontological and one political. The political aspect concerns the question of the validity of historically developed hierarchies in science reflected in education and research structures, which is ultimately also a question of resource distribution. This aspect will not be dealt with further here. However, the ontological aspect raises the question of the nature of research and the nature of art today and ultimately leads to a discussion about the current relationship between science and art.

To illuminate these questions only from one’s own—in this case musical—point of view without beforehand attempting a basic clarification of terms is futile and involves the further risk of looking to justify one’s own practice. Such a clarification is the task of philosophy. This text will therefore take as its signpost Martin Heidegger’s sharply outlined definition of “research” in “The Age of the World Picture” (1938) and his treatise “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935/36). This decision

<sup>1</sup> See Henk Borgdorff, *The Debate on Research in the Arts* (Bergen, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> See Bruce Brubaker, “Questions Not Answers: The Performer as Researcher,” *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 12, no. 1 (2007), pp. 66–87.

is grounded in the belief, regardless of any biographical reservations, that Heidegger views these questions from a wider perspective, that his definitions can provide an external basis for argument on the current discussion, and that they have the advantage of clarity: Heidegger calls things by their name. Both essays appeared in German in *Holzwege* (literally, forest path; figuratively, dead end; published in English as *Off the Beaten Track*) in 1950. This title can certainly be seen as a wink: the possibility exists that the path is still indeed misleading.

### SCIENCE AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH

In Heidegger's interpretation research is the main attribute of modern science: "The essence of what is today called science is research."<sup>3</sup> According to this, research is the process through which modern science pursues its main concern, knowledge. This specific procedure characterizes modern research and distinguishes it from the medieval view of science and that of Ancient Greek culture, which knew no research. According to this, a division of scientific and artistic research would be nonsensical. The concept of artistic research demonstrates its main weakness by suggesting such a division. Artistic research can only refer to scientific research that has artistic practice as its subject—as the totality of activity, work, and experience. Non-scientific research would have to redefine its main concern. Is this what artistic research means? And how can research be defined whose main concern is not knowledge? Why should it then be declared as research? This way of thinking leads to a dead end.

However, it is not now a matter of terminology but of the thing itself. It therefore makes more sense to define the actual process described today as artistic research than to introduce new terms. Such a description cannot be achieved by dissociation from scientific research. This is likely a reflex stemming from the attempted demarcation from the established natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, which have a different connection to their research field. Heidegger explains this connection [Bindung] with the example of physics. However, before we go further into this question we should first return to the definition of the concept of research.

According to Heidegger, the nature of research consists of the fact "that knowing establishes itself as a procedure within some realm of beings in nature or history. Procedure, here, does not just mean methodology, how things are done. For every procedure requires, in advance, an open region within which it operates. But precisely the opening up of such a region constitutes the fundamental occurrence in research."<sup>4</sup>

According to this, artistic practice is just such a "realm of beings," just such a region. But artistic practice does not thereby become research, just as research does not become artistic practice. Art opening itself up to science as a field of research is connected to the development of artistic practice and the concept of art itself. With its shift from the sacred to the social realm, from the temple into the exhibition hall, from the church into the concert hall, and from there further on into public space, art has opened itself up for science. Art was out of reach for it in the temple. Now it has settled in public and intervenes in all areas of social activity. Sometimes it is a work, a statement, a presentation; at other times it is individual action or experience; and at still other times it is a collective social process. One of the characteristics of art today consists in opening itself up to science and thus research.

### SENSUOUSNESS

The opening up of art to science and thus research has the consequence that research must find specific forms of dealing with its subject. Now we can again take up Heidegger's idea of connection or bond [Bindung] with regard to natural science. Scientific research connects/bonds itself to its subject—natural processes—through its exactitude. This is exemplified by the experiment, in which a certain process is established as a principle and made controllable, in that it can be observed, calculated, and measured. Exactitude determines the rigor of scientific research. All procedures must make allowance for this requirement. "Science becomes research through the projected plan and through the securing of the plan in the rigor of procedure."<sup>5</sup> According to this we would have come

3 Martin Heidegger, "The Time of the World Picture" [1938], in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 57–73: 59.

4 Ibid., p. 59.

a little closer to what artistic research is if we could determine its rigor. What requirement must it fulfill so that it can treat its subject appropriately; on what is its “rigor” based? This can only be sought in the essence of art itself.

We can describe art experience as sensuous experience, and the result of artistic activity as form perceivable by the senses—if we understand form not as solid shape but as the possibility of relationships.<sup>6</sup> Artistic practice is activity that enables the world to be perceived by the senses. Sensuous comprehensibility is the precondition specific to art, the prerequisite for artistic practice and artistic experience. The “rigor” of artistic research must therefore be connected with the fulfillment of this precondition. Whereas exactitude is a requirement for research in physics, artistic research requires that which is in accordance with sensuous comprehensibility. Artistic research must therefore find forms for the investigation and representation of sensory perception that do justice to artistic practice. This is the common ground of artistic activity and artistic research. If we accept sensory perception as a fundamental similarity we can then proceed to the actual question of the difference. The relationship between electroacoustic music and research on the basis of a concrete example can be taken as a starting point.

### RECOGNIZING/EXPERIENCING

During the course of the twentieth century, art music underwent a change from an aesthetic of expression to an aesthetic of experience. This transformation was heralded by the rise of instrumental music at the end of the nineteenth century as it pushed back vocal music and thus the word as the vehicle for content in favor of autonomous creation.<sup>7</sup> The significance of perception and the understanding of sound as an acoustic phenomenon fundamentally changed musical practice in the second half of the last century. New modalities for the experience of sound such as interaction and immersion as well as the emergence

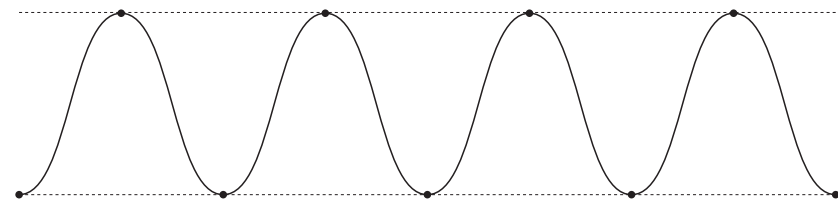
5 Ibid., p. 60.

6 “The possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the form of the object.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London and New York, 2001 [1921]), p. 7.

7 See Carl Dahlhaus, *Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, 1982 [1967]), pp. 24–31.

of new forms for the exhibition of sound in the context of sound art exemplify this transformation. Composition is no longer primarily a matter of bringing something to expression, of revealing something, but rather of opening up opportunities for the experience of sound. Musical form is not only dominated by syntactical and rhetorical structures, but can be completely determined by sound processes and sound phenomena. Electroacoustic research arose from the search for a deeper understanding of phenomena of sound, space, and perception, and became indispensable with the invention of new forms of sound production and control. It is the logical continuation of the millennia-old practice of musical instrument-making. What originally began as an expansion of the range of instruments with the invention of the first electronic instruments at the beginning of the twentieth century consolidated itself into research work after World War II.

The examination of various acoustic phenomena, including, for example, the phenomenon of beats, has since the 1960s guided Alvin Lucier in the composition of very diverse pieces.<sup>8</sup> These ever-present phenomena can be sensuously experienced in his music in a very specific way. The arrangement of the equipment is similar to an experimental setup that has been designed to achieve a particular effect. However, in contrast to electroacoustic and psychoacoustic research, Lucier does not aim to describe, examine, or measure acoustic phenomena in themselves, but rather to open them up to sensuous experience and thus make them productive for the sphere of art. Such setups of sinus generators, loudspeakers, and acoustic instruments would not be suitable



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8 See Alvin Lucier, *Reflexionen: Interviews, Notationen, Texte 1965–1994*, 2nd rev. ed., (Cologne, 2005).

for research in the fields of acoustics and psychoacoustics, nor rigorous enough for the purposes of precise logging, and a composition would not be the adequate form of presentation for possible findings. Artistically, however, they are relevant in many ways and of exemplary rigor in their consistent application: everything that is detrimental to an acoustic experience is avoided. The variations, played in diverse, related works, show the intention of wanting to observe a phenomenon again and again from different perspectives.

The rigor of artistic practice has a different orientation than the rigor of artistic research. However, sensuousness plays a central role in both cases. For example, questions of acoustic perception are also the focus of psychoacoustic research. This research must be properly conducted with respect to the conditions of sensuous comprehensibility. Although the definition of sensuousness as bond helps to clarify the question of what artistic research is, it is not sufficient for the purpose of discovering its differences from artistic practice. What differentiates a psychoacoustic experiment from, for example, the investigations that lead to a composition by Alvin Lucier? We already have one part of the answer: research is directed towards knowing and art towards experiencing. Even if artistic activity can undoubtedly lead to acquiring new knowledge, its main concern is not knowing but rather opening up possibilities of experience. This does not mean, however, that artistic practice does not proceed rigorously. Nevertheless, its rigor is not directed towards understanding but towards creating sensuous experience.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZATION/INDIVIDUALITY

With Lucier, music becomes a way of hearing. The explosive critical force of his position emerges from the North American musical tradition since Charles Ives, and is related to positions of other composers of his generation such as Gerard Grisey and Helmut Lachenmann, who, in their distinct ways, take sound as an acoustic phenomenon as the starting point for their musical composition. The criticism is, on the one hand, directed against the predominant compositional practice of the time, which viewed sound as the result of the manipulation of its parameters, ordered it in accordance with mathematical criteria, or controlled

it through numerical proportions or chance; and, on the other hand, against the nineteenth-century view of music perceived as outdated.

From this, another difference between artistic practice and artistic research is revealed: artistic practice articulates itself on the basis of individual positions which, though related to each other, demonstrate their precise characteristics in the singularity of individual works. Conversely, artistic research, like every other form of research, articulates itself on the basis of institutions. Heidegger describes this as the "character of constant activity" of research: "Research is not, however, constant activity because its work is carried out in institutions; rather, institutions are necessary because science, as, intrinsically, research, has the character of constant activity."<sup>9</sup> The character of constant activity is explained as follows: "The methodology through which individual object domains are conquered does not simply amass results. Rather, it uses its results to direct itself toward a new procedure... This having-to-be-based on its own results as the ways and means of a progressing methodology, is the essence of the character of research as constant activity."<sup>10</sup>

Research activity in the field of electroacoustic and computer music had already, in its first phase, established itself in existing or newly established radio stations, universities, and institutions. Artists were also partners of the research institutes from the beginning and their inclusion and the exchange of ideas and information with them were of central importance for research processes. Particularly the commonly seen dual vocation of composer and researcher served as a catalyst for the development of research in this field. Nevertheless, artistic practice in electroacoustic music does not have this character of constant activity. Autonomy and responsibility have always rested with the individual. Artists deal with available knowledge selectively and methodically but not systematically. The whole history of music is not in each new work.<sup>11</sup> Works are the result of individual activity and responsibility rather than the product of institutional operations, even when the institutes put their infrastructure and research findings at the service of artistic practice.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 63–64.

<sup>11</sup> "In the mechanical installation that enables physics to smash the atom we have the whole of physics up to now." (Ibid., p. 63.)

## GENERALITY/SINGULARITY

Ultimately, a third characteristic aspect of research can be derived from institutionalization: research findings are open and have the character of being for the public good. In contrast, the findings of artistic activity are orientated toward the singularity of individual works and not toward general use, even if third parties can benefit from them. In research work the researchers withdraw into the service of the world at large, whereas in artistic practice the artist faces the public as an individual. “The more unconditionally, however, science and research take seriously the modern shape of their essence, the more unequivocally and immediately are they themselves able to stand ready to serve the common good; and the more unreservedly, too, will they have to withdraw into the public anonymity of all socially useful work.”<sup>12</sup>

Now we can almost fully answer the question previously posed by way of example: “What differentiates a psychoacoustic experiment from the processes that lead to a composition by Alvin Lucier?” The experiment is directed towards *understanding*, it is the result of *research work*, and the knowledge has the character of being *for the public good*. The processes that lead to the composition are directed towards *experience*, they are the result of *individual responsibility*, and are applied to the *specific characteristics* of a work. The only thing now lacking for the differentiation of research and artistic practice is, however, the most important: the concept of truth.

## TRUTH

The nature of art must be sought in relation to truth. Heidegger also grounded his definition of an artwork in the clarification of this relationship. “The essence of art . . . is truth’s setting-itself-into work.”<sup>13</sup> But research as a way of understanding must also be questioned in relation to truth. It wants to explain the way things are, and secure and provide the unsecured as knowledge. This is where the confusion lies: that what

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Artwork” [1935/36], in *Off the Beaten Track* (see note 3), pp. 1–52: 44.

is different can appear identical. The knowledge that should be secured by research and lead to the assumption of truth always remains provisional until it is corrected or overturned by new findings. The truth that becomes visible through artistic experience is indeed inconsistent because it repeatedly returns into concealment and can dissimulate, but in the moment in which it reveals itself it is incontrovertible. These are two distinct conceptions of truth. Both are unattainable, but each for different reasons. Knowledge systematically amassed by research is consistent but uncertain; truth opened up by art is certain but fleeting. Art opens the possibility of experiencing the truth, but does not guarantee it. Knowledge supposed to be best secured through research must continually question the limits of its validity.

The main difference between science and art—as two forms of appropriating the world—lies in their respective relation to truth. The main difference between artistic research as science and artistic practice must also lie therein. They are different modalities of seeking the truth and connected by a fuzzy sort of relationship. We can thus not do without either and cannot decide for one or the other as the correct one. But the difference must exist. The possibility of their reciprocal fertilization is based on this. Neither art need pretend to be research nor research need pretend to be art.

## FIGURES

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| A | Alvin Lucier, <i>In Memoriam Stuart Marshall</i> (1993), performance score (excerpt)<br><a href="http://www.gardenvariety.org/projects/lucier/booklet.html">http://www.gardenvariety.org/projects/lucier/booklet.html</a> |
| B | Mathematical sinus function of a sinus tone<br><a href="http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinuston">http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinuston</a>  |