

Art as an object of study



“in this moisture between us where the guinep peels lay”
by Christopher Udemezue

... there is a language of images. What matters now is who uses that language for what purpose. What is really at stake is much larger. A people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history. This is why - and this is the only reason why - the entire art of the past has now become a political issue.



Is art “real”?

Yes

- Realism: art exists independently once its been discovered (Samuel Alexander)
- issues: disputes over what is art and what isn't, consensus

No

- products of imagination, fiction
- “conscious self-deception” (Konrad von Lange)
- issues: goes against common sense

Yes and no

- context
- experience/plurality of modes of being
- artifact/event + work of art as separate entities
- clusters, family resemblances

Yes and even more so than anything else

- idealism

How do we experience art?

- ❑ Through senses
- ❑ The larger context
- ❑ Questions of authority



"Barael" by Robert Roest (2023)



Selma Selman,
Platinum,
Performance, 2021

- Do you have an intuitive answer to the question is art real or not?
- Does the scientific examination of art "destroy" the emotional impact and experience it provokes in seer?
- Does art have an inherent non-verbal/mystical/transcendental quality to it?

Does it matter?

- ❑ Technological advancements render the question even more difficult (Benjamin)
- ❑ “Art” as a category is wide
- ❑ Why should we care? Who does it help?
- ❑ Is there anything more to authenticity/particularity of art except its monetary value?



“The classic, common sense trinity—what is art? what is politics? what is their relation?—becomes obsolete as soon as it is acknowledged that there is not a single, ontological answer to any of these questions.”

Gabriel Rockhill in *Art and Politics in the Time of Radical History*



Still from "Nightlife" by
Cyprien Gaillard

Science Wars

Scientific realists

We can observe the world as is and
that is what science is built upon

Analytical philosophers

Einstein



Perpetuating existing unjust
hierarchies

Postmodernists/Post-structuralists

Our judgement is clouded by
power-structures, assumptions, etc.

Continental philosophers

Bergson



Relativism
Dangers of anti-science attitudes

We recognize here the classical way for scientists to deal with philosophy, politics, and art: “What you say might be nice and interesting but it has no cosmological relevance because it only deals with the subjective elements, the lived world, not the real world.”

Bruno Latour, “Some Experiments in Art and Politics”, 2011



Hannah Levy

Questions

- ❑ How would you define the difference between the opposing sides of the “science wars”?
- ❑ Do art and science have fundamentally different goals? Are there any similarities?



LuYang, Netineti, 2022

Back to art and the 21st century

- ❑ Bottom line: transcendence and its existence, or essentialism
 - ❑ Art as an object of study - can it be reached? Should it?
 - ❑ We are all trying to say or do something about our world
 - ❑ There are valid reasons to keep science and art separate, but they can also benefit from each other
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- ❑ Can art get closer to reality than science? Sometimes.
 - ❑ Art as an object of study but also as a continuation of inquiry about the world
 - ❑ Art as a tool for utopias and imagination
- to be continued...

Further reading

Allen, A. (2016). *The end of progress: Decolonizing the normative foundations of critical theory* (Vol. 36). Columbia University Press.

Benjamin, W. (1935). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1936.

Berger, J. (2008). *Ways of seeing*. Penguin UK.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist studies*, 14(3), 575-599.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-network-theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Sloterdijk, P. (2011). *Bubbles: Spheres Volume I: Microspherology*.

Resources:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/>

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/>

Art and science



Fin Simonetti, My Volition 6, 2021

Issues with scientific knowledge

- ❑ recap: false sense of rationality, recreating existing unjust power structures
- ❑ Criticism of Enlightenment
- ❑ “the blackmail of Enlightenment” (Michel Foucault)
- ❑ Disillusionment with “progress” after the 2nd World War (latest)
- ❑ Ideology critique

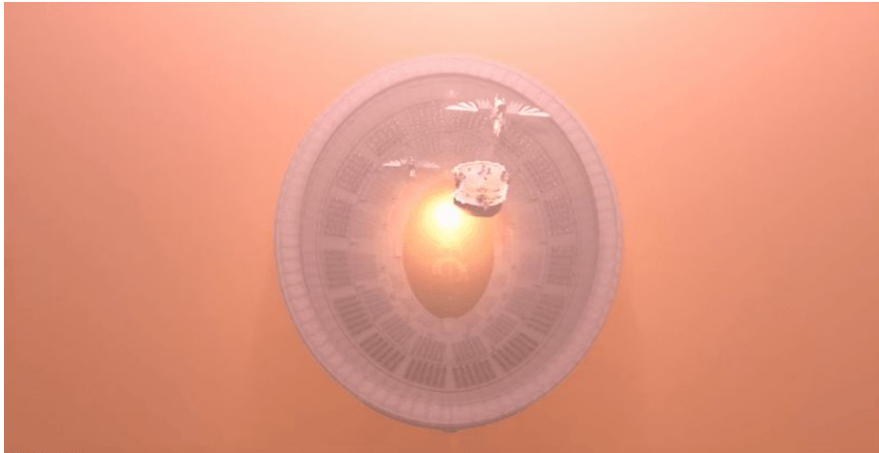
Seyla Benhabib & critical theory and postmodernism

- ❑ Issues with postmodernity
- ❑ The difficulty of critique
- ❑ Art and critical theory
- ❑ The Other
- ❑ Not against a collective authority, but an authoritarian vision

The problem of authoritarian knowledge

- ❑ Applies in particular to social/human sciences but also relevant in other forms of science
- ❑ Claiming to see beyond what the majority of people are able to see (seeing beyond ideology)
- ❑ Knowledge from above
- ❑ Falsity isn't enough

- ❑ Looping effects (Ian Hacking)
- ❑ Care-giver example (Sally Haslanger)
- ❑ Factuality not always a good way to measure reality



Birds in Paradise (still) by Jacolby Satterwhite

- ❑ Limits of language and concepts
- ❑ Violence of concepts and identity thinking (Theodor Adorno)
- ❑ Priority of the concept over the particular
- ❑ Contingent/arbitrary things start to seem natural
- ❑ Justifying things through their current existence, this is how things are so this is as they should be
- ❑ Seeing knowledge as ahistorical, universal

- ❑ Are there phenomenon that are questioned in your field that people at large seem to take at face value?
- ❑ How do you see your role as a doctoral student/academic/scientist? Do you think some sort of authority is needed or justified over the general public?

- ❑ A need for more practice based approaches that allow new experiences, ways of thinking and tools for social change (Sally Haslanger)
- ❑ Art as a way to glimpse at different possibilities
- ❑ “A non-discursive moment of truth” (Seyla Benhabib)
- ❑ Relatability without generalization
- ❑ Art is always made, never given (Henk Borgdorff)



Auto Wing IV by Hanna Antonsson

Art as a negative utopia

- ❑ Art does not have to rely on concepts, generalisations or abstraction
- ❑ Why negative?
- ❑ Foucault: rather heterotopia instead of utopia
- ❑ Adorno: togetherness of diversity
- ❑ Both negativistic definitions of utopias, any concrete vision of utopia coming from our current condition will recreate some of its issues
- ❑ Art does not produce the same type of knowledge as science, nor should it aim to
- ❑ Art as a way to ask and formulate questions (Inkeri Koskinen)
- ❑ Modesty as a key value (Amy Allen), melancholy science (Gillian Rose)

- ❑ Does critical theory/philosophy over-interpret works of art? How do we ensure that that doesn't happen?
- ❑ What do you think are the ethical issues with generalizations and conceptual thinking?
- ❑ Can you think of utopias or shared visions of future in your field?

A constellation of knowledge?



Fuzz Dungeon (still) by Jeremy Couillard

Artistic research

- ❑ Should it be held to the same academic standards as other academic fields?
 - If not, what is its status as research?
 - If yes, do we lose something in the trade-off?

- ❑ Art as research poses the question: what is academia in the first place?

- ❑ Historically there is no reason to see the divisions between humanities and natural sciences, sciences and arts as definitive

- ❑ Scientific vs. artistic experiments: maybe not that different after all?

“In artistic practices, too, experience and expertise that have sedimented into tacit knowledge form a fertile ground for a dynamic, creative, and constructive process that enables the emergence of the new and the unforeseen.”

Henk Borgdorff “Artistic Practices and Epistemic Things” in *Experimental systems: future knowledge in artistic research* (2013)



X

Saint Fiona's exact number of adoptions is disputed, however most fionologists agree she had 333 children.

CLOSE

Length: 1-2 pages, font size 12, spacing 1.5.

Please choose one of the following themes for your essay:

Write a short text using an existing artwork to highlight or explain a concept, theory or phenomenon within your field of study. Use said artwork to investigate or clarify your phenomenon of choice.

OR answer the following question:

What does modesty as a value for research mean in your field of study? Could this modest approach mean there would be room in your field to implement more experimental methods, like artistic research? (If your research is already artistic, contemplate on whether its relation to the scientific research. Are there similarities? If not, why not? Could it be implemented as a form of research or a way to gain knowledge of the world?)

Questions? edna.huotari@helsinki.fi

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Benhabib, Seyla (1986). *Critique, Norm and Utopia*. Columbia University Press.

Brown, Wendy (2005). *Edgework: Critical Essays in Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton University Press.

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Fricker, M. (2007), *Epistemic Injustice: Power and The Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haslanger, Sally (2017). Racism, ideology, & social movements. *Res Philosophica*. <https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.1547>

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<https://journal.fi/ajatus/article/view/77487>

Molderings, Herbert (2010). *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment*. Translated by John Brogden. New York: Columbia University Press. First published as Molderings 2006.

Rose, G. (2014). *The Melancholy Science*. Verso.

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