

Decolonizing thinking: artistic research as epistemic critique

This panel aims at exploring artistic research and post-colonial theory as complementary forces for radical destabilizations and transformative extensions and diversifications of current concepts and practices of thinking.

The idea of an “artistic research,” that is, an autonomous form of inquiry realized through artistic practices, gives rise to a field of tension between the terms of this compound (art and research) that necessarily leads to a twofold critique. On the one hand, the concept and practices of art have to be scrutinized in relation to their inherent epistemic agencies, and the art system needs to be examined as a field of enabling conditions for these agencies to unfold. On the other side, the epistemic framework underpinning the concept and practices of research needs to be set under critical inquiry in order to incorporate the specificities of aesthetic epistemologies, and the research system have to be reconsidered in order to facilitate such an integration. In a similar way, a genuine openness to the diversity of forms of thinking in the Global South requires a fundamental questioning of the hegemonic epistemic principles of Western culture: the concept of knowledge as propositional knowledge—a knowledge that has to be logically constructed and can be produced in the media of language, based on the principle of correspondence and therefore necessarily defined in a realistic-representationalist cognitive paradigm.

On this basis, this panel proposes to address these two intertwined questions: Can the epistemological critique necessary to realize artistic research as an autonomous form of inquiry be mobilized to contribute to decolonize thinking? And can the epistemological critique carried out in the field of postcolonial studies be mobilized to contribute to think artistically and/or aesthetically?

Current theoretical approaches such as embodied, situated and distributed cognition, material entanglement or new interpretations of phenomenology influenced by these frameworks indicate the possibility of overcoming the sphere of epistemology towards new and wider accounts on the collective and transformative emergence of sense and our reflective and reflecting being in the world.

Bios

Alex Arteaga is a freelance artist researcher who combines and hybridizes aesthetic, phenomenological and enactivist research practices through an inquiry into embodiments, environments and aesthetic cognition. He lectures in different universities and art centers and develops long-term artistic research projects such as Architecture of Embodiment or Contingent Agencies.

Dieter Mersch is Professor Emeritus at the Zurich University of the Arts. He studied mathematics and philosophy in Cologne, Bochum and Darmstadt. He has been Full Professor of Media Theory at University of Potsdam and director of the Institute for Critical Theory at Zurich University of the Arts. Last publications: Epistemologies of Aesthetics (2015) Manifesto of Artistic Research (2020).

Mika Elo is professor of artistic research and the head of the doctoral program in fine arts at the University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland. The areas of his research interest include theory of photography, media aesthetics and epistemology of artistic research. He is participating in the discussions in these areas in the capacity of visual artist, educator, curator and researcher.

Nkiru Nzegwu is SUNY Distinguished Professor in the Department of Africana Studies and the Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies program in Binghamton University, New York, as well as Professor Extraordinarius in the School of Transdisciplinary Research and Graduate Studies, UNISA. Her research interests are in African and African Diaspora art and aesthetics.