

Konceptualisering fra praksis

Knowledge Production in the Arts: History,
Concept and Methodological Considerations *

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By Sidsel Nelund

Fig. 1: Email announcements from 'E-flux' and 'Art & Education'
sent in the period from 4 April—3 June, 2012

Discussion on Critical Knowledge Production In Art, Science, Activism

e-flux hosts a special discussion with Maria Elena Torre, Public Science Project, New York, Oliver Marchart, political theorist, Vienna and Lucerne, and Danna Vajda, artist and writer, New York, moderated by Nora Sternfeld, ecm, Vienna. Organized in collaboration with ecm, University of Applied arts Vienna.

In the world of visual art, many events have come to the fore with a strong focus on the art academy's status in both the cultural and theoretical arena. Strikingly, these events all seemed to continuously draw attention to strict and one-dimensional processes such as the introduction of the Bologna regulations in the art academy or attempts to define artistic knowledge production. Those forms of one-dimensionality necessitate investigating anew what art academies are about. This time in multiple and fluid modes, where art academies can emerge as temporary, autonomous sanctuaries for artistic thinking-in fact the utmost and decisive factor in art education.

In order to tackle such forms of one-dimensionality and replace them by fluent modes of investigation, CCA Tbilisi has recently initiated to organize an idiosyncratic dissemination platform: a Triennial not only implying visual art, but also including a focus on art education and its related forms of research. The first edition of this Triennial, entitled *Offside Effect*, will take place from October 19 until November 20, 2012.

The notion of *Offside Effect* can be understood in various metaphoric modes. For example, in the mode of artistic thinking breaking through formalized frameworks of knowledge production. Or in the mode of agonistic, heterogeneous forms of laboratory-based education remedying homogenizing approaches. The ultimate ambition of the Tbilisi Triennial *Offside Effect* is to map a variety of practises in the form of activities, economics, methodologies, and strategies all connected with the experimental field of artistic thinking.

Liverpool Biennial

At Liverpool Biennial you will develop research activity relevant to the exploration of urbanism and the value of art and culture in post-industrial cities as a strand of commissioning and knowledge production within the Biennial. You will work with the Artistic Director of Liverpool Biennial to develop a public platform for the presentation of artists' and curatorial research to ensure that the research informing the Biennial and generated through its programme is world class and underpins the thinking and development of the Liverpool Biennial.

"Documenta 13 emerges as a consequence of a kind of resistance, a formal resistance, a conceptual resistance to epistemological closures and knowledge production. Let's say that I am on strike."

-Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

For its summer program, the Audain Gallery has commissioned the New Delhi based Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) to present a site-specific work in the large windows outside of the gallery on Hastings Street. Entitled *The Primary Education of the Autodidact*, the work addresses the university as a site for **knowledge production**.

The understanding of the university as a stable institutional site of education and knowledge production has historically undergone a dramatic shift towards it as a contested place and platform or the production of different forms of knowledges.

Institutional forms of pedagogy and established forms of education have intersected with self-directed and individual modes of learning, understanding, and knowing, and such intersections are still ongoing. One could understand this pattern as a struggle between learning and knowing from above and learning and knowing from below. In this struggle, students are considered to be both active subjects, guided by their own autodidactic creativity, and passive objects receiving their education according to the regime of the institutional production of knowledge. The potential for active individual creativity seems to be at permanent risk of being absorbed by universities, which eagerly incorporate all kinds of knowledge and forms of knowledge production, often at the loss of critical autonomy.

Starting from the concept of artistic knowledge production the participating artists discuss and demonstrate how performative dimensions play a significant role in-rehearsing-various practices such as interventions in public space, formulation of artistic and research strategies, development of display systems and curatorial perspectives, and generation of artists' texts and artists' lectures.

TOWARD STUDIES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN THE ARTS

The Field of Knowledge Production

Contestations over practices of knowledge production has become a far-reaching, influential dynamic in contemporary arts. Ponder the excerpts quoted on the previous page: April, 2012 brings the announcement of a discussion on critical knowledge production in art, science, and activism organized by the influential news digest organ 'E-Flux' in New York; 12 April, 2012 ushers in an announcement about a new triennial in Tbilisi in Georgia initiated in order to re-think the art academy 'in fluid and multiple modes' by focusing on artistic knowledge production; 20 April, 2012 brings a job vacancy for a position focused on commissioning and communicating research and knowledge production within the Liverpool Biennial; 1 May, 2012 brings the announcement of this month's *Art Forum* quoting from an interview with the curator of the exhibition *dOCUMENTA 13*, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who is on a formal and conceptual strike against 'epistemological closures and knowledge production'; 29 May, 2012 announces a commissioned exhibition at the Audain Gallery in Vancouver with the New Delhi-based Raq's Media Collective, whose work addresses 'the university as a site for knowledge production'; 3 June, 2012 sees the announcement of a two-day event at SALT in Istanbul that takes the concept of knowledge production as a framework and starting point for rehearsing performative aspects of artistic knowledge.

All of this content arrived in my inbox within a two-month period in Spring 2012, and came from announcements made by E-flux and Art & Education.¹ All told, this influx testifies strongly

1) E-Flux was established in 1998 and today its news digest, journal, and other projects reach more than 90,000 people on a daily basis. Art & Education announcements is a collaboration between E-Flux, Art & Education and

about knowledge production's primary position in a flood of projects, events, practices, and jobs that have been washing over the contemporary global art scene since the early 2000s. This sample ranges geographically across India, Georgia, Turkey, Germany, England, the US, and Canada, and it spans institutions ranging from alternative exhibition spaces, to non-profit organizations, to university galleries, to privately and public funded biennials and quinquennials, as well as art magazines. The practices encompass installations, performances, lectures, video and site-specific work in urban areas, as well as administrative work for established institutions and curators. The announcements mainly seek to criticize, re-define, or unfold the concept of knowledge production. Some take it for granted to a greater degree. Conceptually, knowledge production is deemed to include discursive practices, artistic research, practice-based research, educational research, and the idea of 'non-'/ 'un-'/ 'not yet' knowledge. While not an exhaustive representation of the field, these examples reveal the manifold uses of the concept of knowledge production and its geographical, institutional, professional, and conceptual dispersal.

This article situates knowledge production in the contemporary arts within the context of the global dynamics and knowledge economy that emerged following the end of the Cold War in 1989. It undertakes a summary of a previous, longer analysis of knowledge production's uses, meanings and practices.² In the article's first half, I outline the field of knowledge production together with key artistic, curatorial and educational practices. The second half is devoted to developing a theorization of the concept. Based on this theorization, I conclude with a methodological question designed to guide future studies of knowledge production in performance and the arts. Such a contribution is rendered urgent and important by the multiplicity of meanings and uses attached to knowledge production (reflected for instance in the diverse range of examples cited above) that oftentimes emphasise a general discussion of knowledge and art, thereby overlooking the rich and diverse singularity of artworks.

Given the multiplicity of uses attached to knowledge production within the arts,³ the first problem to address is agreeing upon the precise meaning of the term. How might we define it? And with what conceptual tools? This article proposes an understanding of knowledge production as *a contextually framed concept which at a given point in history allows for certain art practices* – some of which I will describe shortly. Such an understanding maintains the breadth of the concept's scope and simultaneously allows for the singularity of its appearance in each practice. It conveys the sense that the concept and the practices mutually shape one another, together with the historical and contextual framework in which they are enacted. Thus, rather than pursuing a fixated answer to the question of what knowledge production *is*, this definition places the emphasis on the *workings* of the concept at this specific moment in history and within visual arts and

the journal *Art Forum*, which since 2006 has worked as a news digest reaching about 80,000 recipients worldwide, with the journal taking a more discursive approach to the events they circulate. 'About Art & Education', *Art & Education* <<http://www.artandeducation.net/about/>> [accessed 06 November, 2019]; 'About E-Flux', *E-Flux* <<http://www.e-flux.com/about/>> [accessed 06 November, 2019].

- 2) These questions were explored in depth by Sidsel Nelund's PhD thesis from 2015 entitled *Acts of Research: Knowledge Production in Contemporary Arts between Knowledge Economy and Critical Practice*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen. This study is the first, nationally and internationally, to present a comprehensive analysis of knowledge production as both a historical condition, a concept and a diversity of practices in contemporary arts.
- 3) This article focuses on knowledge production in the contemporary arts, however the term has been widely employed in relation to academic research, and to the development of the role of the university in a knowledge economy. For a description of artistic research in relation to academia, see Bogh and Tygstrup, 2011; for a description of knowledge production at universities at the end of the 20th century, see Gibbons et al., 1994; for a critique of the implementation of knowledge production in academia, see Gorm Hansen, 2011, Harney and Moten, 2013, Hessels and van Lente, 2008, as well as Lazzarato, 1996; and for an overview of the discussion, see Nelund, 2015, pp. 68–76.

performance. Throughout this article, I will unfold the workings of knowledge production from a practice-oriented and conceptual angle.

The primary impetus for this study comes from a fascination with the practices that in the early- and mid-2000s were talked about under the heading of knowledge production. A diversity of artistic, curatorial and educational projects framed and articulated social problems and concerns in terms of economic, historical, and geopolitical issues, exhibiting an attentiveness to both material and research. This attentiveness, along with a focus on urgent issues, resonated in various places around the globe. Knowledge production was often viewed as having a critical air and was used for art projects that thoroughly questioned the prevailing state of affairs in many societies. Today, as seen in our opening samples, the concept of knowledge production more frequently reflects tropes from the early 1990s, when the use of the term in artistic circles tended to be linked to critical practices. What has prompted this development? The second impetus driving this study is a desire to understand why and how the critical art scene of the 1990s, especially as represented by the curators and educators around *Documenta 11* and the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London, (Nelund, 2015, pp. 76–83) appropriated a term which in fact had been used for decades in strategies and discourses of the neoliberal knowledge economy. These were strategies that those working in the critical art environment were deeply concerned about and wanted to avoid and challenge. This desire to challenge the neoliberal economy's influence on education and the art market manifested itself in part through experimentation with new formats, collaborations, and theoretically informed knowledge sharing (Nelund, 2015, pp. 78–81). Such experimentations have today become more widespread and have been incorporated into the structure of art and curatorial and educational institutions through standardization of practice-based research. But comprehensive studies of these practices are still lacking, especially in relation to wider societal developments such as knowledge economy.

If we affirm that knowledge production, among other things, designates a set of practices, let us first take a closer look at how these practices might materialize. The case studies mentioned here have been scrutinized in depth elsewhere (Nelund, 2015, pp. 93–262). They bridge a variety of practices within artistic, curating, and educational research;⁴ they are situated actively within the field of knowledge production;⁵ and they challenge normative ways of producing knowledge.⁶ In addressing these three areas, this article relies on the following questions to power its discussion: *How is knowledge production conceptualized as an act of research? What elements combine to produce the act of research itself, the material investigation within the art work or exhibition, and the norm-breaking resistance to knowledge production?*

4) To direct the investigation and discussion, each area of artistic, curating, and educational research focuses on specific practices in relation to a common topic. These topics are 'image and war' for artistic research; 'curating and global dynamics' for curating research; and 'pedagogical relations and economy' for educational research.

5) These case studies are chosen from an extensive mapping of the field of art practices (Nelund, 2015, Appendix 1). This mapping noted uses of the term *knowledge production* or *artistic research* in practice descriptions. The selection methodology adheres to the *tracing the concept* as described in (Marcus, 1995). While La Bienal de Habana did not use these terms directly in its first years, they have since been written into the history of discursive exhibitions (Niemojewski; Weiss, 2011).

6) The article 'Sammenligninger' highlights how a comparative approach across case studies from different areas can co-create the analysis and allow for the case studies to critically. speak back to the topic under scrutiny (Petersen et al., 2019).

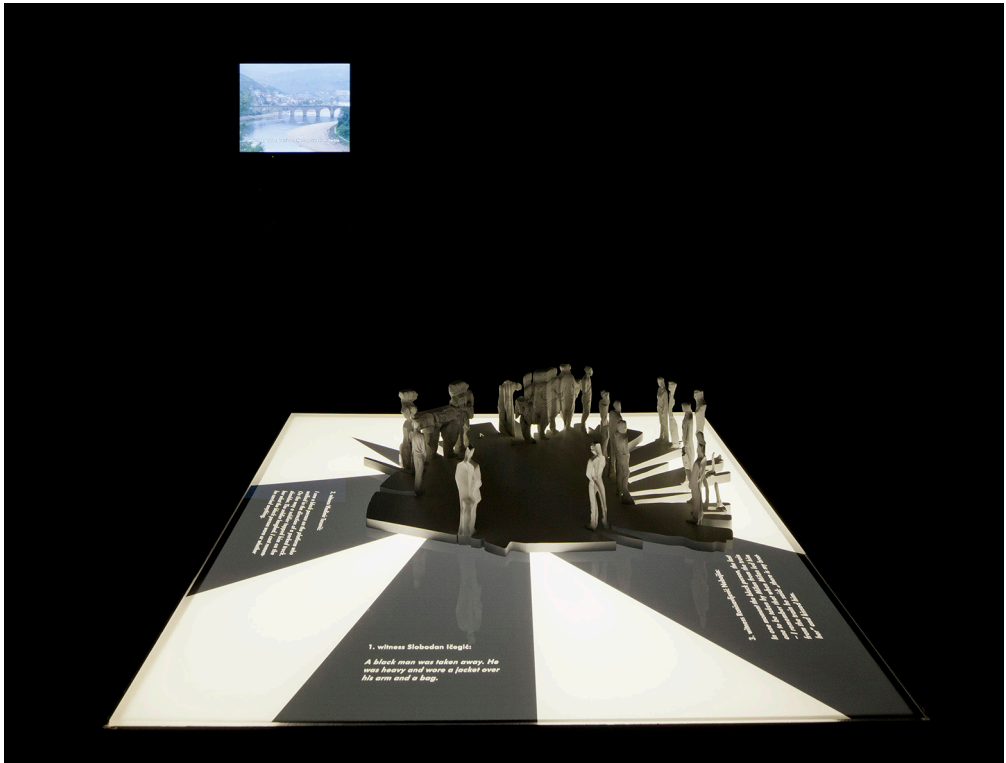


Fig. 2: Hito Steyerl, *The Kiss*, installation view Overgaden – Institut for Samtidskunst, 2011 (Photograph: Sune Berg). Courtesy of the artist and Overgaden - Institut for Samtidskunst



Fig. 3: Rabih Mroué, *The Pixelated Revolution*, 2012 (Still from video). Courtesy of the artist & Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut / Hamburg

In our scrutiny of artistic research, it is helpful to briefly trace the history of such practices. We see the seeds in early modernism (Nelund, 2015, pp. 45–59) and the word appears for the first time in the 1960s in the US. It later materializes more fully as a concept and a practice in Europe in the 1990s. This occurs in tandem with the use of knowledge production in specific critical art educational contexts (Nelund, 2015, pp. 58–91).

From this extremely large field, I have chosen to select three case studies of artistic research that use the image (artistic material) to investigate war (topic). This combination of war and image is not chosen randomly, as modern image technology has been (and continues to be) developed as a war technology aimed at being able to see the enemy without being seen (Virilio, 2010). As such, this analysis allows us to underscore very clearly the ways in which material and topic work together. Hito Steyerl's video installation *The Kiss* (2012) traces the disappearance of a black, unnamed man during the Yugoslavian civil war with the use of a new 3D technology that promises to reveal the truth of any crime scene. Applying this technology to a reconstruction of the crime scene, Steyerl tries to map the truth behind the man's disappearance; yet despite her efforts employing the technology, she ends up where she started. The technology fails to reveal truths about the crime, nor does it explain why a kiss was given from one of the military men to the black man and what this meant for his disappearance. Instead, we see a de-armouring of the new technology in front of the poetic possibilities in a man disappeared while the piece pays tribute to this life otherwise ending in the unknown.

In a similar vein, theatre director, artist, and actor Rabih Mroué sets out to find the truth in images. His video installation and performance lecture *Pixelated Revolution* (2012) visually dissects videos released on YouTube during the early days of the Syrian civil war in which civilians filmed a soldier in the streets who takes aim and shoots toward the camera, which falls to the ground, leaving the image to go black. Is the cameraman or woman dead? This is the question Mroué poses to the images that he looks at frame by frame. Meanwhile, he speculates, using 19th century optical science, that since the image is still alive – circulating on YouTube – the people portrayed must still be alive. Optical logic demands that they cannot be dead. Here, Mroué applies a possibly innocent approach to a tragic political situation by finding a speculative refuge in scientific argumentation and validation.

Where both Steyerl and Mroué present video installations as a visual, forensic strategy disclosing the fallacies of documentary truth, The Otolith Group's *Nervus Rerum* (2008)⁷ presents a video work as a visual strategy of opacity. In the video, the camera pans around a Palestinian refugee camp with a voice over composed of several literary sources (Genet and Bray, 2003; Pessoa, 1991) related to the Palestinian representation and experience of inertia. The film intentionally does not subtitle the graffiti on the walls or the interviews or conversations with inhabitants of the camp. As such, The Otolith Group, together with Steyerl and Mroué, engage with their material (the image) in acts of research that are also acts of resistance to documentary regimes of truth and transparency (Bruzzi, 2006; Corner, 1996; Demos, 2013; Jones, 2005; Lind and Steyerl, 2008). In these ways, artistic research is partly to be found in the process, in the act of composing the artwork in relation to a specific regime of knowledge, and in the way in which the artwork allows for theorization about the topic of war and representation through its material composition. We might wish to see the enemy with the advanced visual technologies of the modern era, but is it ever really possible?



Fig. 5: Home Works Forum 5, 2010 (Photograph: Sidsel Nelund)

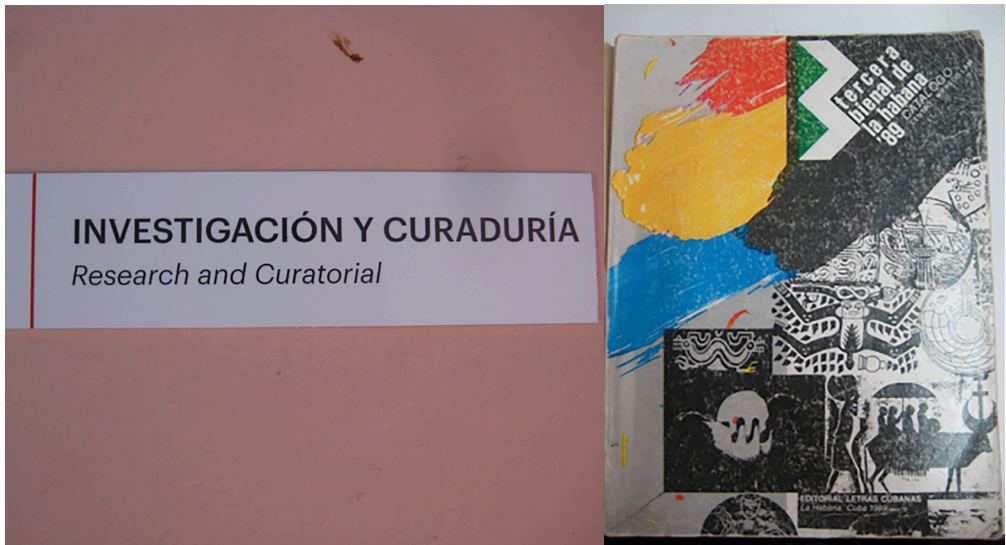


Fig. 6: Photos from the archive of Bienal de Havana's catalogue from 1989. Photos taken April 2014 (Photograph: Sidsel Nelund)



Fig. 7: *dOCUMENTA (13)*, 2012 (Press material)

The field of curatorial research has also expanded since the 1990s, and curating as research has grown since the 2010s (Bismarck, 2011; Lind, 2010, 2009; Martinon, 2013; Nelund, 2014; O’Neill and Wilson, 2014; Rogoff, 2006). Yet connective threads potentially link such practices back to transnational exhibitions conducted since the post-WW2 period (Demos, 2011). A global outlook is a key feature of curating research – and this is certainly true of the three case studies presented here. *Home Works: A Forum for Cultural Practices*, curated in Beirut since 2002 by Lebanese curator Christine Tohmé and Ashkal Alwan, is a space for dialogue through cultural practices that responds to a chosen topic in resonance with regional current political or affective affairs. A variety of practices are brought together – including dance, theatre, literature, art, and philosophy – all of which contribute to new ways of formally and conceptually approaching the chosen topic. Curating research here entails not only the act of raising a topic and selecting responses to it, but also having a responsive relationship to the surroundings shaping this process. This enables exhibitions that speak to the contemporary scene in a series of directly norm-breaking and simultaneously instituting ways, while forming art practices and affective moods or actual institutions. For example, Home Workspace Program is a one-year postgrad art education program that grew directly out of *Home Works*.⁸ In recent times there has been a surge in exhibition series like *Home Works* in Europe (BAK, 2009; Filipovic et al., 2010; Nelund, 2018; “The Anthropocene Project,” 2013) and this kind of topic-oriented, multidisciplinary, and materially experimenting exhibition is probably the most widespread form of curating research today. One possible antecedent of such work is *Bienal de la Habana* (1984-2015) in Havana that

8) The possible future Home Workspace Program was first discussed in a series of panel debates named *In and out of Education at Home Works 5* (Sadek, 2010).

started as an attempt to culturally strengthen the Third World and which had an impressive set-up of discursive events from the outset (Niemojewski, 2010; Weiss, 2011).⁹ In terms of legacy, *dOCUMENTA (13)* (2012) in Kassel can be seen as an example of curating research after *Home Works*. In *dOCUMENTA (13)*, artistic research was the main topic of the exhibition and the art works were chosen for their capacity to speak independently (Martínez, 2012) thus moving from art as an instrument for discussing urgent issues to letting the art works speak more freely. One such example was a piece from the National Museum in Beirut that consisted of various archaeological objects melted together caused by bombings during the Lebanese civil war. The piece's form entailed a coming together of different archaeological temporalities and traces of a transformation speaking directly to the visceral impacts of war.

These three exhibitions help to illustrate the genealogical trajectory that has seen curating research change from a postcolonial, critical research mode with *Bienal de la Habana* to an instituting, responsive, trans-local and form-experimental mode of research with *Home Works*, and now to a research approach which explores the artwork as an object, emphasizing its materiality and capacity to speak on its own in global, interdisciplinary research projects.



Fig. 8: Cátedra Arte de Conducta 2002-09

9) Dedication to collectively exploring and going beyond a merely formal representation in the exhibition was the theme of the 10-day lecture program, leaving two days for open discussion. The emphasis in the exhibitions was on soft power and political alliances rather than formal expressions.

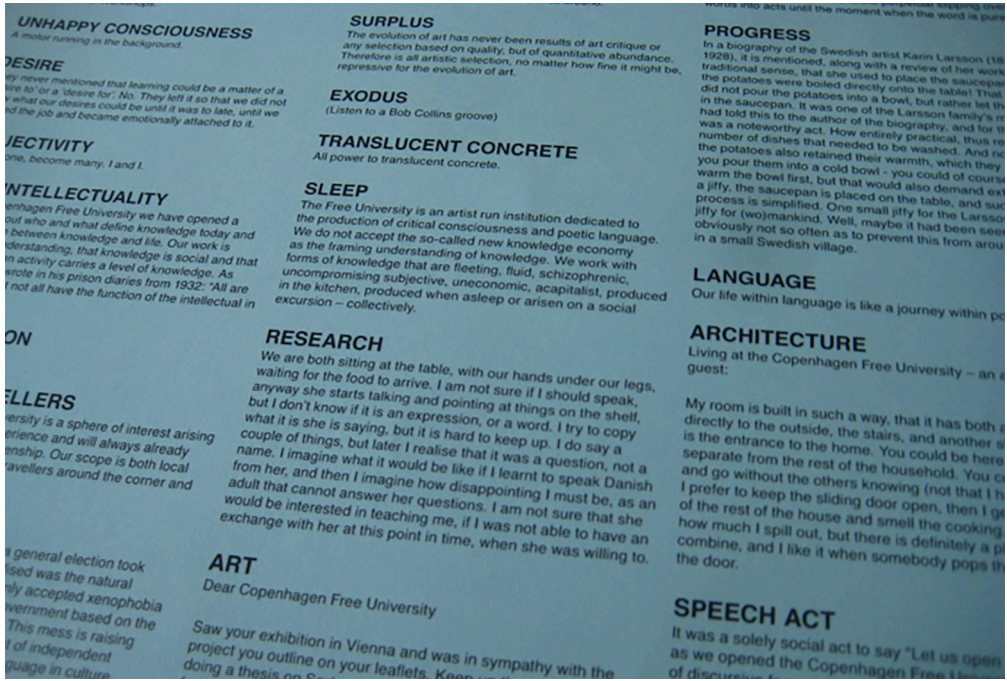


Fig. 9: Copenhagen Free University, 2001-07. Archival material (Photograph: Sidsel Nelund)



Fig. 10: Learning Place, 2013 (Press material)

Another set of practices within this manifold area of knowledge production is educational projects. They also emerged strongly in the 1990s, often in response to the knowledge economy and the market economy which were starting to push educational objectives toward fulfilling the needs of the job market rather than providing opportunities for learning and autonomous knowledge (Hamann, 2011). One well-known historical educational project was *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2002-09), by artist Tania Bruguera, situated in Havana, which aimed to create useful art in response to the national art school's focus on purely formal exercises apt for the global art market (Bruguera and Helguera, 2009, 2009; Lambert-Beatty, 2009). A second project of this nature was *Copenhagen Free University* (2001-07), by artists Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen, which took place in their home as part of an effort to foster collective and intimate ways of working with knowledge in art. These two projects both explored the capacity of knowledge engagement and collective, empowering pedagogies to counter the global art market and knowledge economy respectively. A third, later example is the educational performance *Learning Place* (2013), by cultural critic Boris Buden, which criticized educational institutions for their economic viewpoints on education, but also alternative educational art projects for their naïve idea that alternative and better kinds of education can be developed by aiming at creating ideal situations for learning. *Learning Place* is thus a critique of the professionalization of education and art. This outcome is performed to its extreme, leading to a rejection of both the educational system and alternative forms such as *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* and *Copenhagen Free University*. This leaves a tabula rasa. Could such a rejection give rise to new knowledge relations? Learning research in all three of the cases sketched above lies in the facilitation of situations in which acts arise that point to the normative application of education in the age of the knowledge economy and a market-driven art scene. Such research actively works with subject-formation and the aim is that through the transformation of learning situations new and critical learning subjects will appear.

Common to all nine examples studied thus far is that they work specifically with a medium (image, exhibition, and learning situations) and a topic (war and representation, the postcolonial, trans-local and postcolonial, art education and economy), which they simultaneously challenge while bringing new formal expressions into being.

Conceptualizing Knowledge Production

Exploring our selection of knowledge production practices has shown us how these case studies engage in dialogue with established regimes of knowledge as well as respond to specific situations and materials, while appearing within different contexts, formats, and knowledge regimes. Now, it is helpful to introduce an understanding of *knowledge production as an apparatus*, in the sense posited by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, as it provides further insights into how the workings of knowledge production come about (Agamben, 2009, pp. 1–24).¹⁰

If we trace the concept of knowledge production, we find that it was developed in 20th century economics¹¹ by what is now deemed the *neoliberal* thought collective (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009) which played an active part in creating a larger ideology that has been implemented slowly

10) The understanding of knowledge production as an apparatus presented here has subsequently found it shares areas of alignment with sociologist's studies of knowledge production, for instance in journalism. See (Undurraga, 2018).

11) To develop the term knowledge production, it is necessary to range beyond disciplinary boundaries and especially dive into areas of economy, education, and policy making concerning international political alliances as well as actual practices. For more, see (Nelund, 2015, pp. 44–91).

worldwide from the 1970s up until today under the heading of *knowledge economy*.¹² Neoliberalism champions competition, self-organized markets, human capital, and the impossibility of planning (Davies, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Mirowski, 2013) and all these elements have influenced areas such as education, policy-making, labour theory, and art over the past five decades, being used to cultivate various distinctive practices.¹³ Knowledge production is thereby a term that moves across disciplines, institutions, practices, and politics, being deployed or enacted in different ways in the process (as our case studies have shown). Because of its multi-functional and multi-dimensional character, I propose as an overall conceptualization to understand knowledge production as an apparatus, following the latter's theorization by Agamben, whose understanding is in turn based on French philosopher Michel Foucault's notion of the 'dispositif.' The apparatus is 'anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings' (Agamben, 2009, p. 14). This 'anything' can be 'a set of *practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions* that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient – in a way that purports to be useful – behaviours, gestures, and thoughts of human beings' [my italics] (Agamben, 2009, p. 12). Agamben develops his notion of the apparatus based on an economic genealogy of *oikonomia*, which is 'the administration of the *oikos* (the home) and, more generally, management' (Agamben, 2009, p. 8). *Oikonomia* is not an epistemic paradigm, but 'a practical activity that must face a problem and a particular situation each and every time' (Agamben, 2009, p. 9). This means that the apparatus is a series of actions, not a constant or stable being, and thus comes about in its enactment.

As per Agamben's notion of the apparatus, knowledge production would then be comprised of: *a set of practices* (in this article these have been artistic, curating, and educational research); *a body of knowledge* (which might be histories and theories of knowledge production, or – as seen in our case studies – war, the global, and knowledge economy); certain *measures* (such as educational and cultural policies); and also *institutions* (most pertinent here would be educational institutions and exhibition organizations). Together, these components work as an apparatus that creates the subjectivities of those humans who enact, mediate, and receive knowledge production. Knowledge production as an overall concept is immersed in different areas in which it takes different shapes. The areas that are more prevalent in society would be media/representation, commercial business, science and technology, art, innovation, and higher education. Each area contains its own measures, practices, institutions, and bodies of knowledge. Within each of these areas, knowledge production functions differently, and art is only one small part of the overall workings of knowledge production; however, they are all influenced by one another. Within this bigger picture, this study focuses on knowledge production in sites of contemporary art understood as bodies of knowledge and practices (as in the case studies), and less as institutions and measures, even though these dimensions are implicitly present throughout.

One of the consequences of framing knowledge production theoretically as an apparatus is that knowledge production is understood in terms of the co-operations of different elements that are continuously developing, and *not* as a representation of a stable entity. Moreover, it is a conception that includes an inherent urgency in that it involves the shaping of the very life and subjectivity of those involved – something which is clear in the case of the educational projects of Tania Bruguera,

12) Some of the first references to knowledge as inherent in economy appeared in the 1940s in the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek's article "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (Hayek, 1945). Hayek was instrumental in promoting the ideology of neoliberal thinking and contended that knowledge should be introduced as an economic asset in a nation's economy (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Nelund, 2015, pp. 58–68)

13) For further references, see footnote 3.

Copenhagen Free University, and Boris Buden. This initial theorization of knowledge production gives an overall form to the concept and it designates locations and practices in which knowledge production will take place. The aim is for the initial theorization to work as a conceptual navigation tool that can differentiate between practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions, without losing the sense and importance of their co-operation.

In short, an apparatus controls and models gestures and discourses of living beings, but it is also a practical activity addressed to contingent situations, such that it is deployed anew each and every time, much as we have seen in the case studies. Knowledge production in this sense is both a modelling and a subjectifying concept, yet one that comes about through the practical activity of situations – like the creation and perception of art. It is a set of ideas that are acted out in singular practices, which, through an oscillating, co-existing movement, contribute to the process of defining the concept. The meaning of the term takes shape vis-à-vis the practices that *enact* it, and these practices unfold in the case of art largely within artistic, curating, and educational *research*. Hence, the following section will examine whether we can understand these practices as a series of *acts of research*.

Acts of Research: Innovative Action

Our initial theorization of knowledge production as an apparatus has not yet provided an understanding of its workings. The formulation of knowledge production as a series of *acts of research*¹⁴ opens a path to learning more in this regard. Acts of research would then be defined by their capacity to act in relation to a hegemonic knowledge regime, considering both the specific (material) situation and the norms that constitute it. This is a relatively open definition, though one which goes to the heart of production within specific knowledge regimes and in relation to specific materials.¹⁵ The concept of acts of research allows for a mobilization of the relationship between a topic and a material. We witness such a mobilization in the work, for instance, of Hito Steyerl, Rabih Mroué, and The Otolith Group, where the concept of war (topic) and the image (material) both intertwine with and give shape to each artwork. By using this open definition envisaging acts of research, I am choosing to adapt a possibly naïve position that avoids formulating a ‘strong theory’ (Sedgwick, 2002, pp. 133–136), in that I do not examine what kind of knowledge system should be applied to knowledge production. Instead, I approach the concept as being deeply embedded in contemporary society and practice and not necessarily one that asks us to continue disciplinary debates about what knowledge is, what art is, and whether constituting a source of knowledge is an essential property of art. Therefore, in this case, knowledge production is the conceptual heading under which one can analyse specific practices of artists, curators and educators, and the concept thus arises through the matrix of these practices and the conceptual history of knowledge production in the arts.

Here, amid the early stages of theorizing acts of research, we should take a moment to consider

14) In alignment with philosophers such as Paolo Virno, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, the term ‘act’ has been chosen here instead of terms such as modality, practice, mode, process, or methodology, in order to emphasize the ability to act in the moment rather than aiming for an outcome.

15) The strategy of operating with an (even more) open definition is also adopted by the editors of an anthology on artistic research: ‘If, in the following pages, we do not offer a definition of artistic research, this is deliberate. We believe that artistic research should not be seen as a discipline or a topic, nor is it really a method. For us, it is an attitude, a perspective, a manner’ (Dombois et al., 2012, pp. 10–11). However, I propose a more concrete understanding of artistic research as acts of research, which entails not only an attitude, but a clear positioning within the apparatus of knowledge production.

the notion of *action*. In this connection it is helpful to turn to the concept of ‘innovative action’ as used by the Italian philosopher Paul Virno. This enables closer scrutiny of the act itself. What does acting imply? And what constitutes an innovative action? Virno describes innovative activity as having its purpose in itself (and not in the creation of an object) and as undermining and contradicting ‘the prevalent belief-system of a community’ (Virno, 2008, p. 129). Virno takes up the phenomenon of the joke as an illustration, describing it as ‘the black box of innovative action: it reproduces in miniature the structure and movements of the action’ (Virno, 2008, p. 129). It is an action within a non-predefined situation that can only be created through an instantaneous knowledge of how to react to contingent circumstances. In making a joke, one responds to the *non-predictable situation itself* as well as to the *norms and rules that govern it*. The significant quality of the joke is that it applies the rules differently (this is the witty part of the joke). When a third person acknowledges this and laughs, the joke reveals how ‘contingent application of the determined rule’ disrupts the ‘everyday frame of life’ by not following a determined rule (Virno, 2008, pp. 116–118). By disrupting the normative application, the situation is immediately transformed, and the transformability of the everyday frame of life is exposed. The joke thus disrupts the situation and produces it anew. This has wider consequences, since ‘[t]he transformation of a form of life takes its origin from the uncertainty experienced in applying a rule’ (Virno, 2008, p. 124).

To enact the uncertainty experienced in applying a rule differently, one needs to be capable of knowing how to act in coherence with a contingent situation; and for a joke to work, one has to seize the ‘opportune moment’ (Virno, 2008, p. 92). It is a practical knowledge that appears in relation to the situation, which makes the ‘innovative action ... an urgent action’ (Virno, 2008, p. 92). In simple terms, it is thus not a science or a skill, as it does not have knowledge or knowledge about acting as its goal. The act itself is sufficient impetus.¹⁶ Innovative actions are thereby not categorically their own, but always happening within an already existing normative regime, in which, for Virno, they disrupt the prescribed connections between rule and application. The joke thereby constructs a crisis in which the ‘application of the norm demonstrates once again, and with maximum clarity, its *intrinsic* (that is, original and inevitable) problematic nature’ (Virno, 2008, p. 109), pointing to how both following norms and disobeying them always entail a decision. In a similar vein, I will argue that The Otolith Group disobeys the norms of representation in their video *Nervus Rerum* – an innovative action that is responsive to a specific situation in a Palestinian refugee camp, and attuned to attendant, distinct histories of representation, thereby also pointing to the normative application of rules of representation. Since Virno operates within the system of language – between grammar and the empirical situation – the material of the joke consists of words and the logic they express. For Virno, the resources that jokes use are ‘*productive fallacies*’ (Virno, 2008, p. 146) in that jokes offer an illogical response to a situation, manifest in the way they break ‘through acquired habits and introduce a diversion in behaviour’ (Virno, 2008, p. 130). The innovative action is by definition unrepeatable; the joke can only work in that one opportune moment.¹⁷

The conceptual sources Virno draws upon reach as far back as Aristotle (*praxis* and *phronesis*), and

16) Virno situates the innovative action in the category of *praxis*, and views it as being capable of *phronesis* (the know-how of acting appropriately in a given situation), drawing on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially part VI. For further definitions, original and contemporary, see (Aristoteles, 2000, pp. 18–24 and 152–154; Fiasse, 2001; Long, 2002; Wall, 2005).

17) This unrepeatability of the action is also the reason Virno differs from the performative theory of a philosopher such as Judith Butler in her early oeuvre, where the performative act is precisely defined by repetition: ‘There is no possibility of *not* repeating.’ It is through the changed repetition that the transformative power exists. (Butler, 1997, p. 377).

include Sigmund Freud's work on jokes, Ludwig Wittgenstein's work on the application of rules and decision-making within linguistics, and German philosopher and jurist Carl Schmitt's work on the realisation of law and the state of exception. Action implies, but is not merely, 'practical know-how that allows us to assess what it is appropriate to carry out within a possible situation' (Virno, 2008, p. 129), but must also be an action that carries the possibility of transformation, the breaking of habits and a diverting of behaviour – hence its innovative standing.

How does the innovative act transfer to art? In the Aristotelian tradition art would be distinguished from the innovative act, because art brings something about, an artwork, and thus has a goal that is outside of itself and not within the act. While an innovative act in Virno's sense can also create a thing (the joke), the thing is not the goal; it is rather a by-product of the act. The concept of the innovative act does not do away with the aesthetic object or situation, but rather shifts the focus to the act of creation by placing the goal in the act itself – a quality which is very present, I will argue, in the projects related to learning by *Cátedra de Arte*, *Copenhagen Free University*, and *Learning Play*.

Since the issue at hand is the *production* of knowledge in the arts, our immediate aim is to explore what it means to understand the process of production in terms of a series of acts that cohere with a contingent situation, the latter being the creation of the artwork and the topic it integrates. The norm of knowledge production is constantly performed anew in different and unrepeatable situations when an artwork, an exhibition, or a learning relation responds to the everyday frame of life and the contingent situation permeating it. Such acts thereby acquire meaning and take shape again and again through their practice. This understanding of working within knowledge production presupposes a focus on means rather than ends. And, as philosopher and art theorist Gerald Raunig points out, the concept of innovative actions must not lose its political actuality when transferred to the arts – which is why situating the innovative act in the public sphere is crucial (Raunig, 2008). This, I would argue, applies in the case of *Home Works* which inhabited new locations in public space for each forum, adapting accordingly, and which initially sought to create a space in which to sit down and talk across sectarian divides in post-civil-war Lebanon.

Acts of Research: Creative Act

Yet Virno's concept of innovative action needs further specification for its use in the arts. At issue now is the question of how the concept relates to the material of an artist, curator, or educator. Here, a useful source of clarification is the term 'creative act' coined by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Developed mainly in relation to philosophy, science, and art – viewed as interventions – the creative act depends for Deleuze on the mode of its expression. Within arts, the creative activity is composed of a compound of sensations consisting, for instance, in the case of cinema, of blocks of movement/duration (Deleuze, 2006, p. 314; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pp. 163–167 and 191–192). A creative act or idea proper to cinema might, for example, involve the separation of sound and image, since this is something specific to the material of cinema, and it works in a specific way within that art form (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 319 and 323–324). Hence, a coherent relationship exists between idea, artwork, and material: 'either the compound of sensations is realized in the material, or the material passes into the compound' (Bogh and Tygstrup, 2011, p. 111; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 196).

There are multiple elements that I find interesting in Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the creative act. Firstly, such an act does not have to be limited to the three disciplines of science,

philosophy, and art, but is dependent on the material with which one is working. It is the material that defines what it means to have an idea 'in' that discipline. For the purposes of this study, one can therefore widen the concept beyond only art works to curating and educational projects, where the materials worked with are the exhibition and learning relations respectively. Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari ascribe a sense of urgency to the creative act in the arts when they say that '[s]ensory becoming is otherness caught in a matter of expression' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 177), recognizable, for instance, in the Otolith Group's methodology of 'doing otherwise' compared to the documentary genre. Deleuze makes a similar gesture when he finds affinities between the creative act in the arts and the act of resistance in the form of producing counter-information against ruling regimes. This notion is connected with 'societies of control' in which information is a controlled system not enacted through confined spaces like institutions such as the prison, the school, or the hospital, but in dispersed, networked ways. One example would be the way education is being transformed from a period of schooling at the beginning of a person's life, into a perpetual state of life-long training in various settings (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 321–323, 1992, pp. 5–6). This development is something which Boris Buden's *Learning Place* problematizes and opposes fully. The creative act is thus seen as a counter-informative act of resistance to existing modes of control, and in the case of Buden's act this resistance is to the ways in which neoliberal education governs the lives of students by focusing on optimizing one's CV rather than the life one lives. Thirdly, by situating the creative act in composition, compounds of sensations, and blocks of movement/duration (in cinema), the act of creation and the artwork itself are interlinked. When conceptualizing painting, Deleuze and Guattari contend, '[t]he act of painting [...] appears as a painting' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 197) from which I understand that the artwork always also embodies the creative act, allowing for the latter to be analysed through the artwork.

If, then, we combine Virno's idea of the innovative action and Deleuze's idea of the creative act, we arrive at an understanding of the act as a reaction to a situation of material work (material work like video filming and editing, writing and orchestrating a performance lecture, gathering an exhibition, or composing learning relations), responding to broader norms and an everyday frame of life. The composition can never be defined before the situation in which it comes about, and both the material and the norm must be contingent. The goal stays within the action, which may or may not lead to the production of an art object, an exhibition, or a learning project. The process becomes an ongoing concurrent investigation of norms and materials.

So far, the concepts of innovative action and the creative act have led us to a conceptualization of art practices in a *responsive* and *displacing* relation to both materials and norms. But how does this relate to knowledge production? In the ensuing discussion, the concept of 'acts of research' will deviate from the innovative and creative acts of Virno and Deleuze & Guattari in that the inclusion of 'research' will add a certain direction to, and exert an influence on, the series of innovative, creative actions.

Acts of Research: Research

By including the word ‘research’, the term ‘acts of research’ refers not only to art practice but also to a notion of informed practice situated in a social, historical, economic, and geopolitical reality. Such an emphasis means that practices of acts of research build up a capacity to attend contingently to materials and norms within areas that necessarily demand knowledge acquisition. Practices of acts of research are thereby deeply rooted in problems of contemporary or historical society and cannot be considered purely material investigations.

A study of the very divergent meanings of ‘research’ can proceed in many ways, from superficial Wikipedia searches to journalistic investigations, interviews and conversations, to sustained academic studies conducted over several years. What is important here is not to set up protocols for the quality or character of the research, but to ensure an emphasis on engagement with larger social issues. For this reason, the focus here is not primarily on the kind of research involved, but on the topics, questions, and problems rooted in historical or contemporary society that urge a research process to be undertaken in tandem with a responsive attendance to materials. These two features, together with knowledge about how to act in given situations, are pre-requisites for the norm-breaking, displacing act.

This view of research resonates with the one posited by cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, who supports grassroots research on a global scale that does not necessarily fulfil the demands of higher education in the West. Appadurai notes that higher education – at least in the US and westernized universities – is characterized by a systematic pursuit that creates new knowledge and is valued by peers in a system of protocols pertaining to institutions of thinking that have been cultivated since the seventeenth century. Such research requires a system of internal academic criticism and is today also shaped so as to fit funding requirements. Research, when practiced this way, creates knowledge through which one can learn, but this knowledge must be able to be replicated.¹⁸ Contrastingly, grassroots research can create a new role for the imagination of social life, which is both what controls and governs people, and at the same time the act through which dissidence and new worlds can become conceivable (Appadurai, 2006; Casas-Cortés, 2009; Möntmann, 2007, p. 4). Here, research and knowledge production are situated in the global context of economic inequality.

The aspects of Appadurai’s thinking that I believe can most readily inform the ‘acts of research’ concept are the instances of research which work independently of the establishment of research through protocols, and which make attempts at thinking new worlds from that position. I contend that one such example is *Home Works* in that it allows for new formats and new imaginaries by virtue of its nature as a meeting that treats urgent matters under less schematic or stringent research conditions. My intention in introducing Appadurai is also to widen the scope to a global context, as the apparatus of knowledge production is deeply implicated in global flows of economy, knowledge, people, and jobs. We should attend to this dimension while staying close to the actual practices, in the sense called for by Virno, Deleuze, and Guattari’s theorizations of the innovative and the creative act.

How, then, do acts of research work within the broader field of knowledge production? According to North American art historian Caroline A. Jones, knowledge production in relation to art needs to be pluralized as ‘kinds of knowledge’ (Jones, 2007, p. 318). She supports her argument through Deleuze’s reading of Foucault’s definition of knowledge as being double, that is, relying both on ‘speaking and seeing’ (Ibid.). Deleuze adds, ‘[e]verything is knowledge, and this is the first

reason why there is no “savage experience”: there is nothing beneath or prior to knowledge’ (Ibid.). Following Jones, the pluralization of knowledge in present-day art practices mostly takes shape as non-universalist, localized, and embodied – as something more akin to experiential knowing than facts. Knowledge production takes place in the studio and the art object thereafter becomes a node in ‘the ongoing activity of knowledge production’ (Ibid.) in a broader context, while also engaging spectators in the production of subjectivities as ‘subject-making machines’ (Ibid.). The artwork as a subject-making machine is especially tangible, I would argue, in the case of Tania Bruguera and her ways of shaping conduct through long-term art projects.

Thus, our study of knowledge production now proceeds via multiple, concurrent conceptions: an emphasis on the process of creation in knowledge production, alongside the understanding put forth by Jones which conceives of artworks as nodes in a broader context of knowledge production. This combination can be explored in *Home Works* and the ways that it works simultaneously on the levels of the artwork *and* on the societal level in relation to public and private memory in the context of the Lebanese civil war and other political situations in the region. However, to the shapes taken by knowledge as defined by Jones, one would have to add politically engaged practices. Relating this view of knowledge production in the arts to the concept of acts of research requires the norm-breaking character to be emphasized. One would also need to include exhibitions and educational projects within its scope, thus placing artworks on the same level as other kinds of cultural production. Coupling the pluralized form of knowledge with the idea of producing knowledge also raises the issue of whether knowledge can at all be extracted from an artwork as a stable entity, or whether knowledge instead comes about through being constantly enacted anew (Stehr and Grundmann, 2005a, pp. 9–11)¹⁹ between discourses, art objects, sites, and instances. Philosopher Stefan Nowotny builds upon Foucault’s notion of pluralized knowledge, saying that it ‘does not “organize” itself under a unified form, but rather in an open, non-dialectical game of concurrence’ (Nowotny, 2006, p. 4) giving us further grounds for understanding knowledge as relational. I would contend that *Copenhagen Free University* provide an apt version of this through their research-driven, collective experimentation.

In summary, the act of research designates a practice consisting of a series of acts in contingent situations. Practitioners will work with a specific material in relation to an area of pluralized knowledge, against the background of a frame of everyday life. These acts have the capacity to disrupt norms and rules. Artworks are nodes connecting the (not purposeful) outcomes of a series of instances of acts of research that can then be put into circulation via the art scene. This shifts the emphasis away from the finished artwork toward a focus on processes of ongoing investigation that might generate artworks along the way. An emphasis on the ongoing process of investigation, as opposed to the goal of producing a product, is shared to varying degrees by all the case studies we have examined. This generates a multi-faceted question which we might pose to any forthcoming studies of knowledge production, research, and art: *How is knowledge production conceived as an act of research? And which elements combine to make the act, the material, the research, and the norm-breaking resistance?* Animated by this question, each study can remain open to the contingent character of art production, yet each study gains specificity in its relation to the workings of knowledge production.

19) For multiple definitions of knowledge, starting with Plato in 360BC, see (Stehr and Grundmann, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e).

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