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Conference report — SwissGradNet Discovery Conference No. 1

What is the Practice in Use-inspired Basic Research in Design, Film and Art?

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by Gabriel Flückiger and Siri Peyer

The conference SwissGradNet Discovery Conference No. 1 - What is the Practice in Use-inspired Basic Research in Design, Film and Art? marks the founding of a network consisting of three Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and their international partner universities. the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI) and the Bern University of the Arts (HKB) – led by the Lucerne School of Art and Design– invited partner universities with whom they already collaborate in teaching and research to Emmenbrücke.
The aim of these Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences is to work with universities entitled to award doctorates on developing models within the network for the supervision of doctoral students resident in Switzerland in the fields of design, film and art, and thus to be able to offer joint conferences, lectures and colloquia. At the conference, representatives of the network's associated partners, namely Hans-Joachim Neubauer from the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF, Shilpa Das from the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad in India and Gesa Ziemer from the HafenCity University Hamburg, as well as invited guests Susannah Thompson from the Glasgow School of Art and Volker Eichelmann from Kingston University London, presented their respective institutional frameworks for doctoral projects.

In addition, there were more fundamental assessments of the research infrastructures: Markus Köck, a doctoral candidate at the HKB Saar and co-organiser of the network *DESIGN promoviert*, gave an overview of the universities and art academies in Germanspeaking regions that offer doctoral opportunities in design. He also reflected on the fact that design research, despite a long tradition of design theory, still faces the challenge of being recognised as a scientific discipline.
Stefan Winter – visiting professor at the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF – offered a completely different perspective on the practices of artistic research: he presented a range of formats of PhDs in the Arts from all over Europe, which, according to his observations, are becoming increasingly internationally anchored, and are demanding and maintaining institutional spaces, financial means and an accompanying representation.

PhD students and researchers were also invited to present their projects and show how possible practices of use-inspired basic research manifest themselves in concrete terms. Recurring, complex issues included the relationship between research and practice, the incorporation of theory, and one's own positioning within one's discipline and neighbouring academic fields. However, because both artistic and design research are characterised by open research concepts and there are no homogeneous or generally applicable research methods, this debate intermingles transdisciplinary clarifications, adaptations of existing, mostly socialscientific protocols, and – especially in artistic research – attempts to continuously circumvent and reflect on one's own practices and procedures. It is probably precisely in the undefined nature of this comparatively new field that its great potential lies.

The reason is that it seems inevitable that individual research projects are characterised by idiosyncratic attitudes, procedures and perspectives. There exist innovative approaches, such as that of Daniel Shanken, an artist and PhD candidate affiliated to Kingston University London: he translates immense amounts of digital data into topographical, virtual realities, thereby transforming today's permanent supersaturation into an artistic principle – known as ‚deep rendering' – that is informed by neuroscientific discourses – a principle that creates constantly changing artistic works.

In addition, there are complex facilities that strive for a symmetrical, complementary commitment of art and science. In his doctoral thesis at HafenCity University Hamburg, Sebastian Matthias investigated how the sphysical-musical experience – the ‚groove' feeling often felt in music clubs and dancing – can be analysed using qualitative methods such as participatory observation and interviews. In his research, his own physical knowledge as a trained dancer and choreographer was of key research relevance, and he materialised his results both as new, performance-related artistic activity and in dance-scientific discourses. The research project *DisAbility on Stage*, presented by Demis Quadri of the Accademia Teatro Dimitri SUPSI, also deals with concrete bodily experiences. In three practical studies, it examines communication in the rehearsal process and the reception of plays featuring performers with disabilities, investigating the possibilities of participation of people with disabilities in dance and theatre training.

It is not uncommon for researchers to focus on their own role and positioning by way of topic. The designer and design scientist Andrea Augsten reported on her work at Volkswagen headquarters, where she analysed operational processes as part of her thesis. As an embedded scientist, she learned in particular how to reconfigure her own research practice by observing unfamiliar technical practices and linguistic codes, and how to shape her role in the company in a self-reflexive way.

Finally, these potential roles do not shy away from political-activist traits: take Darcy Alexandra, today an associate lecturer at the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Bern, who pursued an "engaged" visual and anthropological practice in her thesis project by running workshops imparting technical and writing skills (camera, editing, script) for illegal immigrants in Ireland. In collaborative working steps, cinematic products were created that identified the participants as author-actors with emancipatory self-awareness.

But how can this heterogeneity be institutionally framed and monitored?
The artist Lucie Kolb, who also holds a doctorate, emphasised in her contribution the necessity of project-specific types of publication. Referring to the self-organised *Studio for Artistic Research* in Düsseldorf and the research project *Forensic Architecture*, an initiative set up at Goldsmith College as an institute within an institution, she argued that both self-organised and classical institutional contexts can adequately disseminate artistic research. The key factor – and here she sees artistic research basically as an institution-critical venture – lies in the extended negotiation of the respectively necessary conditions of publication. The development of strategies and guidelines for doctoral programmes should thus be concerned not so much with establishing standardised work steps as with focusing on the productivity of new, sometimes unforeseeable forms of knowledge production.