

Acts of Creation – Introduction

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Why do we need to think about artistic research supervision when doctoral supervision in general is such a well-established field? What particular skills are needed for a supervisor to get under the skin of an artistic research project? How can PhD candidates be guided so that the artistic projects develop fruitfully? What are the ethical implications of supervising an artistic research project? What is the meaning of method and theory in this kind of research? And how will the supervisors contribute to the development of the field of artistic research?

These and similar questions have been at the fore in the discussions between a group of supervisors at Konstnärliga forskarskolan (KFS), the Swedish artistic research school, over the past few years. By the time KFS was established as a nationwide structure for postgraduate education in the arts in Sweden in 2010, artistic research had been expanding for a decade, but as a discipline it was still more evocative of an archipelago of small, unconnected islands than a unified field. This had certain implications for PhD candidates and supervisors, as well as for the institutions, since there were no established structures to fall back on. Many of the standards in form and principles in the humanities and natural sciences do not relate to the field of art at all. Procedures for peer review, publications, conferences, examination and theory/practice relationships commonly differ from, or have no counterpart in artistic research. These principles had to be rethought.

Research supervision, which is at the heart of any doctoral programme, often lacked established research environments, institutional support and understanding of the role of the supervisor in the area of artistic research. This meant that there was a need to consolidate and

coordinate resources and to support some of the smaller university colleges in establishing artistic research in a more systematic way. Through the formation of KFS, research environments, research education and supervisor training were supposed to be launched and supported simultaneously and in collaboration. With the plurality of artistic genres involved, it soon became a relevant interdisciplinary meeting point for artists in Sweden. One important element in this process was the introduction of the doctoral degree in fine, applied and performing arts, which was officially established in 2009. The funding for KFS came from the Swedish Research Council, and a total of nine universities and university colleges formed part of the collaborative research school, hosted by the Malmö Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts at Lund University, in collaboration with the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts at the University of Gothenburg.

KFS offered PhD candidates from these university colleges research courses, administrative support and, perhaps most importantly, a buffer zone between the sometimes quite rigid structures of administration at the institutions involved, the rules and regulations framing doctoral education in the academy, and the artists' need for latitude and a dynamic organisation for their projects. However, the PhD candidates are not the only people in this buffer zone; the zone also includes the supervisors, which means that it also represents to a large extent the context for the supervision of artistic research.

The need for and the nature of this buffer zone played a central role in the development of the supervisors' network in KFS, the Acts of Creation (AoC). Despite 15 years of artistic doctoral education there was still a lack of artistic researchers trained to undertake the role of supervisor. As a consequence, PhD candidates in artistic research initially had a tendency to turn to established academic researchers with research experience, a degree and training in supervision. These were commonly found in the fields of philosophy, sociology, musicology, etc., which, like many other disciplines, are of great interest to artistic research, but have methodological and theoretical traditions that are often not directly applicable in artistic projects. When KFS was established, this lending of competence was the norm in Sweden, and meant that a common

body of knowledge of how to develop theories and methods specific to the discipline was never initiated or established. One of the aims of organising the AoC was therefore to create a forum for sharing the gathered and collective experience of supervisors in the field, and thereby to build competence from within the subject rather than to continue borrowing academic credibility from other disciplines. A second aim was to contribute to a community of practice where supervisors could exchange experiences and support each other and the development of KFS. Thirdly, the network was arranged as a continuous programme in artistic doctoral supervision, which included discussion seminars, assignments and a platform for interaction and collaboration. All supervisors at KFS were invited to participate in the AoC network's two meetings every year. As a programme, it was built up around three flexible course modules, the first of which included short assignments on the essence of the responsibilities and regulations surrounding research education. The second module focused on the relationship between specific artistic practice and the research activities, including ethical dimensions and practical concerns. The final module involved a written reflection on the context of supervision, and the discussions during the text seminars eventually developed into this anthology.

As we will see from the texts in this book, the position of the artistic research supervisor is not easily defined. It is clear that the traditional doctoral supervisor and the artistic supervisor have much in common, but it is equally clear that the latter does require some special competences. The wider cultural environment of artistic research is characterised by ambiguity towards its development, simultaneously both attracted and repelled by the prospect of a closer relationship with the academy. Obviously, the supervisors of artistic research should support the PhD candidates in their work, but navigating in this context takes great skill and sensitivity.

The participating authors represent several different fields of art. From the visual arts we have Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir, an Icelandic artist, PhD supervisor at Valand Academy and visiting professor at Malmö Art Academy; Hinrich Sachs, a Swiss artist and professor at the Royal Art Academy in Stockholm; and Andreas Gedin, a Swedish

artist and curator. Sverker Jullander, professor at the Music Academy in Piteå, Karin Johansson, organist and associate professor at Malmö Academy of Music, and Henrik Frisk, musician, artistic researcher and associate professor at Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, come from the field of music. Ylva Gislén, Director of KFS, theatre critic and artist, and Tove Torbjörnsson, commissioner of documentary films at the Swedish Film Institute, come from the performing arts and film, respectively. Finally, Åsa Lindberg-Sand, associate professor in educational sciences and Anders Sonesson with a PhD in biology, both from the Centre for Educational Development at Lund University and tutors in AoC, have contributed one chapter about their experience of encountering the field of artistic research through the context of the supervisor's network in KFS.

The contributions deliberately represent a wide range of approaches to artistic research supervision. Our goal has been to reflect the variety of current perspectives on supervision in artistic research rather than presenting a homogenous collection of texts or creating a uniform theory of supervision.

Although the reasoning in the chapters is based on each author's particular discipline, we believe that all artistic disciplines, and perhaps other practice-based research disciplines, may find the topics interesting. They bring out issues that one may imagine are quite general for research supervision and these are approached from different angles by the authors. Several of the texts tend towards a discussion of the structures of research, which is natural at a point in time where so much is still left undefined. Others contain more personal and subjective reflections on the challenges in supervision presented in open and reflective forms.

The risk of this approach is that the result becomes too broad for the material to convey a unified message. On the other hand, imposing strong limitations on the style, topic and scope of the chapters would have resulted in a less appropriate publication in our opinion. They now reflect the fact that the field of artistic research is not a unified one, and this diversity is one of its strengths. However, it is also our hope that this volume will be followed by others so that a dialogue can be initiated on these important issues in artistic research supervision.

Thematic overview

The varying approaches to enacting and conceptualising supervision in artistic research presented in this book share one basic premise, namely, the key precondition that the researcher is also the artist, and the artist is also the researcher. The artist makes a difference (Coessens, Crispin & Douglas, 2009). This is also true for the supervision of artistic research. Even though a project can borrow competences from related disciplines, artistic skill has to play a part. The implications of this are highlighted in the texts and they illustrate the complexity of the supervisor's task and role.

Vulnerability, doubt and insecurity

The context for supervision in artistic research may well be compared to a construction site, and several chapters focus on the insecure, doubtful and even vulnerable situation of both candidates and supervisors. For example, when speaking of supervision, Ylva Gislén notes that the supervisor might often experience confusion when trying to guide the PhD candidate. Tove Torbjörnsson focuses on the troublesome position of artists who supervise other artists without having any formal experience of research. In a personal and poetic reflection on her work with a PhD candidate, she demonstrates the delicate nature of the supervisory situation. This may be compared to the previous discussion of the inclination of PhD candidates to choose supervisors without artistic competence or experience.

Based on their own experiences as PhD candidates, Andreas Gedin and Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir touch upon ethical issues that have become valuable assets in their subsequent work as supervisors. Artists have always explored new territories and appropriated new domains and Gedin discusses the shift between positions in the public arena of fine arts, and how this is related to and dependent on the creation of new loyalties. Snæbjörnsdóttir's background is her position at Valand, Gothenburg University, and she describes a 'landscape of uncertainty' within the contexts both of contemporary art and of the academy, which the supervisor and

the PhD candidate have to navigate together. One of the benefits of the KFS experience, according to Snæbjörnsdóttir, is that it created a space for listening, which opened up a 'constructive vulnerability within the larger establishment'. Anyone who has acquired a PhD or has been involved in a continuous and intense learning period can surely understand what vulnerability means in this process. When the surrounding context is a large administrative apparatus, such as a university, this vulnerability can be daunting, but Snæbjörnsdóttir calls us to embrace it and mobilise empathy through it. As a method for supervision, she argues, it reduces the insecurity of the agents in the field.

Feelings of vulnerability, doubt and insecurity may be experienced as troublesome, but often form a necessary and valuable part of working creatively, regardless of whether this work is defined as artistic processes, research or supervision. In this way they are productive, albeit unpleasant. However, they may also be unproductive, if they are reactions to actual deficiencies in the institutional context or responses to paradoxical expectations in the development of artistic research. As seen in several of the contributions, one important part of knowledge building is to disentangle the productive aspects from the unproductive ones. A key question in the continuous development of artistic research is how to build strategies that can allow for the dynamics of artistic practice within the framework of the educational institution and still adhere to the needs and requirements of the regulations surrounding artistic research education.

Knowledge development in artistic research supervision

Some contributions highlight the need for developing concepts that are specific to the discipline and idiomatic to the practice of artistic research. Henrik Frisk stresses the importance of discussing and clarifying the relationship between theory, method and practice in artistic research supervision. He points to the necessity of deconstructing the hierarchical order between them, which does not mean dispensing with theory or method altogether. That would be just another way of maintaining an unproductive division. If the ambition of artistic

research is to 'defend the artistic work process from the intimidation of the academic attitude and the theory/practice dichotomy, [...] that has reinforced the binary relationship between artistic practice and theoretical constructs', it is now time to explore how this relationship can be dialectic. Frisk recommends a 'non-hierarchical distribution of research resources' in order to create and support methodological and theoretical agency on the part of PhD candidates, and the use of knowledge laboratories that are grounded in practice. This means, for example, looking at theory as something inherent to the artistic practice rather than the view of theory as something that is merely applied.

Gislén suggests a series of intuitively and randomly chosen concepts that nevertheless describe crucial aspects of the situation and process of being a PhD candidate in artistic research. With this format, she imitates Roland Barthes' *A lover's discourse* (1990) and adds a critical, questioning dimension by inviting the reader to re-interpret terms such as Method, Archive and Understand. Apart from capturing some of the intricacies of supervision, this text points to an important topic of discussion in artistic research: how the form of presentation in itself carries a meaning and a message, and how to relate to established and traditional modes when presenting new types of knowledge. Hinrich Sachs gives another example of this in his chapter, which is written as a correspondence between him and a friend who is a heart surgeon. It portrays the difficulties in communicating aspects of quality in professional practice without having a vocabulary and central concepts in common.

The complexity of the supervisor's role

As suggested by Sverker Jullander, the ideal supervisor in artistic research combines many roles in one person. Based on an overview of the legal requirements for supervisors in artistic research, he proposes that such a person would ideally be 'a professional artist with a specialisation relatively close to that of the doctoral student, with a PhD in the relevant artistic discipline, and an academic teaching position, or at least experience of teaching at an academic level'.

Åsa Lindberg-Sand and Anders Sonesson also underline the complexity in the supervisory situation: the fact that those who are admitted to the doctoral programme are usually established artists, and are expected to further develop their artistic practice and the research project simultaneously as a joint or internally related enterprise. In other fields of research, supervisors achieve their authority mainly through their research qualifications, which provide a hierarchy that is taken for granted between the supervisor and the PhD candidate. The supervisors in artistic research have to gain their authority not only from research, but also from their standing in artistic practice. Supervisors with substantial qualifications in both areas are rare and hard to find. This means that there is often no hierarchy that is taken for granted or authority to fall back on for the supervisors. They seem to rely more on the building of a productive and rewarding personal relationship with the PhD candidates than supervisors in other domains do. New forms of interaction have to be built for artistic research supervision, which may also contribute to the general culture of supervision in other disciplines.

The dynamics of evaluation

A point of much debate in the network of the Acts of Creation has been the question of 'what is to be evaluated and how'. Hinrich Sachs focuses on the dynamics of evaluation and quality in the dialogue on the value of art. Is it possible to compare the quality of heart surgery to the quality of a work of art? And is it even worthwhile discussing quality in two such different disciplines? He suggests that what is needed are modes of evaluation that are equal to the artistic practice that is being assessed and warns us of reducing the artistic practice into merely information.

Andreas Gedin emphasises the need for input from agents outside of academia and for feedback on the artistic production while the artist is a PhD candidate. Discussing criteria for measuring quality in artistic research, he looks at examples of actions that can be taken when projects fail to meet standards. Where is the supervisors' loyalty

in these situations? Are their loyalties primarily geared towards the institutions or the PhD candidate?

The supervisor in context

In the development of ‘institutions of education’ into ‘institutions of education and research’ (Lundström, 2013), the process of artistic research finding its position in the system is not always straightforward. Gislén provides a concrete example of this when she points to how individual candidates may experience a lack of understanding concerning their needs for spaces that are suitable for artistic practice. In turn, this demonstrates that the institutional definition of ‘research’ is sometimes not compatible with the view of artistic research as a natural continuation and expansion of the bachelor and masters degrees. In a related passage Snæbjörnsdóttir describes artistic research as the aforementioned context of uncertainty within which the artist/researcher can bring in their own skill set and define, or redefine, what artistic research may actually constitute. This condition of flux may seem to present a problem, but may in fact be an asset in the process of defining the field. In her chapter, Karin Johansson looks at the question of how the supervision of artistic research can influence and promote agency for PhD candidates. Based on a focus group interview with supervisors and PhD candidates, she describes the supervisory situation as acts of collaborative knowledge creation and discusses how it can be developed into what might be called a creative dialogue.

In artistic university colleges or departments in Sweden, the positions of senior lecturer and professor are filled with holders of artistic qualifications. Åsa Lindberg-Sand and Anders Sonesson point out how the increasing number of artists with a PhD challenges the traditional educational and administrative structures that frame the academic career as a teacher and researcher in the artistic field. When experienced artistic researchers continue their development by supervising PhD candidates, they also develop specific qualifications that are important for the further development of the field of artistic research and doctoral programmes. However, there is an obvious lack of post-

doctoral positions and rewards that could nurture these professionals in the institutional context and allow for a senior artistic research environment to flourish.

Hopes and visions for the future

Research depends on the creation and maintenance of a common, collectively shared body of knowledge and experience. The growth and development of any research field therefore also rely on environments where results and processes can be shared and communicated. If artistic research projects are conducted in individual contexts only, without building on and relating to previous research in the area, collective learning and development will be limited. Of course, artistic research projects most often emanate from individually oriented perspectives, similar to how artistic projects are made, but at some point the research has to reach out and contextualise itself in the larger field of research. Even though the traditional modes of communicating art (e.g. concerts, exhibitions and performances) are important, artistic research still only has a limited set of output channels in the academic field. The institutions hosting research and research education therefore need to develop specific environments for this purpose; an ambition that cannot be limited to traditional academic text referencing, but should include works of art not commonly framed as research. Artistic research therefore needs to refactor the academic referencing system for its own purposes, and one of the roles of the artistic research supervisor is to assist the PhD candidates in finding appropriate contexts for communication that are not limited to textual representation.

One interesting question for the future concerns the specificity of artistic research and its relationship to other research disciplines. What is required in order to achieve a sustainable interdisciplinary development of this field? Biggs & Karlsson (2011) discuss the aims and objectives of academia and art respectively in a metadiscussion concerning the identity of artistic research, one that has been lively and intense over the last decades. The present anthology is an attempt to build on and move forward from this debate. From an overarching

perspective, Åsa Lindberg-Sand and Anders Sonesson describe their view of the developments in KFS. Against the background of their involvement in doctoral supervision and research in other disciplines and long-term, extensive experience of training programmes in supervision, they give a vivid description of how much the discipline of artistic research differed from what they were used to. They suggest two scenarios, which could also be perceived as two versions of the future of artistic research. In the first scenario artistic research and doctoral education is viewed as integrated aspects of artistic practice, primarily contributing a safe haven and resources for the further advancement of art, mostly conducted by elite artists as PhD candidates. In this future, both the artistic school/department and the academy as a whole may gain prestige and visibility by putting forward the artistic productions as crowning the academy. However, the fact that artistic practice and artistic research are equated creates institutional conditions in which artistic research is viewed as fundamentally different from other kinds of research, and should be kept apart from the general requirements for the practice of research in the academy. In this scenario, the modes of supervision will probably be framed primarily by the needs of the development of artistic practice, and the contribution of the supervisors to the development of this larger field is probably of less importance.

In the second scenario the interdependencies between artistic practice, research and the institutions are more complex. Artistic research is regarded as an activity separate from artistic practice, even though they depend on each other to a high degree. When artistic research develops as a practice that is not identical to artistic practice, the collective aspects of the knowledge formation in research may step forward and add new social contexts related to, and gaining importance for, the development of art. As a consequence, supervisors also need to be experts in both areas and their role in the PhD candidates' projects as well as in the development of the field of artistic research will be of great importance. Regardless of which of these two scenarios are implemented in the academies, the question that Lindberg-Sand and Sonesson go on to ask is 'how the supervisors will be institutionally, professionally or artistically rewarded for their complicated task'. They suggest that the institutions

providing artistic research have to take an active standpoint towards how the research environment should be developed and how the challenging role of the artistic doctoral supervisor can be institutionally supported. This will be even more important if, in the future, some artistic institutions/departments evolve and profile artistic research towards scenario one and others towards scenario two. This is because one of the gaps between the scenarios is a different framing of the responsibilities for and contributions of the doctoral supervisor both to the work of the PhD candidate and to the field of artistic research.

We are certain that this book can contribute to the dialogue around the advancement of artistic research and research environments by highlighting the crucial and complex role of the supervisors in this development. Artistic research in Sweden is in a strong phase of progression, and senior researchers and supervisors need to stand at the forefront and be among those who lead the way forward in this process. However, the development of environments where results and experiences can be shared and communicated is not only a task for individual researchers. Challenges have to be seen as inspiration at an institutional level as well. As pointed out by Karin Johansson, 'this is a long-term, collective process that both requires and results in individual growth, group development and a continuous rethinking of the institutional self-image. Consequently, it depends not only on personal capacities and initiatives of individual supervisors and PhD candidates, but on strategic efforts and investments at a university level'.

References

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