

# When Eros Drives Artistic Research

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this text is to relate artistic research to the search for knowledge driven by Eros. It is necessary to focus on one way of researching -in the arts- to see if its objectives and its epistemological contributions are beyond the requirements of producing proven knowledge. The artistic process that is driven by amorousness could take its epistemological nuclei -the intuitions that are expressed on every artwork- and develop them conceptually on the surface itself of the work of art, resulting in a place that reunites intuitions and concepts to resume the integration of knowledge.

The purpose of this text is to relate artistic research to the search for knowledge driven by love, as described in Plato's philosophy as *Eros*. Firstly, I want to enquire what art could bring us in its approach to research, taking a critical distance to the demands that are made on artistic research in the academic environment: It must produce knowledge, assessable results, and show the applicability of such results. The final goal is to imagine that in the researching procedures in which art participates, an amorosness could occur that drives the researcher to give themselves to the object in search of its *depth, origin, or truth*, involving their entire being to give appearance to the intuition of what is loved, which is one aesthetic aspect that does not exclude the conceptual process of thinking.

The aesthetic production that occurs within artistic research *in* the arts would be differentiated from merely artistic manifestations in that the researcher's intuition is expressed on a *sensible* surface, presented as *epistemological nuclei* that will be developed in the artwork itself but using tools of a borrowed method, resulting not in knowledge proven, but rather in a problematization of the artistic content itself. I want to distance this reflection from the idea that art provides functionalist results and is useful for scientific and technological progress. I do not want to say that artistic research could not contribute particular knowledge or research strategies to other disciplines, but rather that it is not reduced to those functions alone. I propose instead that research *in* art is more linked to the Platonic search for truth than to any methodology that tests knowledge until it is proven.

I will speak about the kind of work that is produced in the artistic processes and in the artwork itself when they are related to certain kind of research, and present their contributions in the process, and in the artwork itself. I make this specification about the type of research that I am interested in addressing, according to the distinction between the types of artistic research: *on* the arts, *for* the arts, and *in* the arts (Borgdorff, 2012; Frayling, 1993), thus focusing on the latter.

I will weave the text around the assumption that whoever does research *in* art creates a link between processes of artistic creation and some method belonging to another discipline, in order to manifest in various dimensions, the research problem (in this text philosophy will provide us with the tools to think about the epistemological problem of love in art). This connection articulates a tension that

primarily presents us for aesthetic problems. That is, the discussions will not take place primarily at the level of the method or the discourse of the other discipline, philosophy in this case, but in the reflection on the *aesthetic surface*, in which tools from other fields of thought are used.

The link between art and other disciplines changes the way in which the sensible (aesthetic) manifestations are materialized, and therefore, it is necessary to rethink how art appears in the artistic research event; why it appears as it appears: as a text, as a mind map, as an archive, and what particular contributions it produces (which do not occur in art without this interdisciplinary exchange). All these questions, impossible to exhaust, are related to the point of interest: That they help to prevent art from being reduced to a methodological strategy of production of knowledge within research. Further, that they allow a horizon from which to imagine artistic research as a *loving search* that is interested in the particularity of the object.

I write this text from the voice of a choreographer and visual artist, but I am not talking about my own practice in this framework but taking it as an experience that allows me to reflect on what is possible to imagine, especially when creative processes are linked to other ways of speculating about the world.

## Art and Research

Henk Borgdorff points out the need to revisit three issues that help us to think about what constitutes art in research: ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects. The ontological, he says, would define the nature of the research object; the epistemological, the knowledge that it contains or produces; and the methodological, the means used for the research process (Borgdorff, 2012). Such perspectives reveal that there is a network of dimensions of artistic research that is difficult to separate insofar as the artistic practice is not reduced to method.

The ontological issue is the one of interest to reconsider here, because it indicates a unifying depth of the artistic research event as the field that gives character to the research, because it responds not only to what is being inquired about, but also why it is inquired in the first place. It becomes then the ground that gives reason and purpose to research. It is the depth that keeps the research activity united to its object, because in such an ontological

environment, researching acquires a Heideggerian sense, in that the search is driven by the question of the Being, of the origin, the call to source (Blumenberg, 2012/2016; Heidegger, 1979/1985). In this way, moving towards the origin of things does not mean the verification of them, but rather their enjoyment.

To assume this ontological stand, I propose to think of research in art as an event, because its labor is not dealing with a fixed object to be analyzed, verified, or measured. It is an event insofar as the practice and the artwork go through what has been researched; and what is researched is approached at the level of intuition, inquired through a practice that is not always conceptual, and shared in a non-verbal translation or discursive transmission (Borgdorff, 2012). The ontological approach makes it possible to recognize that art and research have a common objective which is to shape ways of thinking about the world. Art can claim that it does so but without the need to abandon its stage of intuition. As the artistic expressions are beyond the concept, according to Hegel, and in them the freedom or emancipation of the human being is shown (Huesca, 2020). This common cause does not yet explain to us the reasons why art would be considered as a way of research; but it gives us a purpose of art that will guide us in the research work, to make explicit the artistic way of thinking about the world, which sometimes include borrowing methods and tools from other disciplines.

*Artistic research* is an expression that began to be used regularly in the first decade of the 21st century, in university environments in northern Europe (Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland), and in the United States (Borgdorff, 2021; Lesage, 2009; Vilar, 2021). It reflects an effort to understand the validity or relevance of the cultural production of the arts that occurs in making artistic studies professional within universities. From its inception, it has reflected new requirements towards the contributions that art and its development should have in the production of knowledge. Shortly thereafter, and continuing to the present day in some university contexts in the European environment (with the Bologna Process in 1999), artistic research is asked to meet objectives demanded by other disciplines in educational systems: That it produces novel and relevant knowledge for its field and using methodologies, often imported from the social sciences (AEC, et al., 2020; Lesage, 2009).

The same is taking place in Latin America, in postgraduate programs in Mexico and Argentina, for example, which are not unified with tacit agreements but with implicit criteria, which tend to be universal, on the duty of academic research; as the idea that artistic research occurs in the articulation between artistic praxis and rigorous knowledge such as pedagogy, history, in order for this knowledge to become congruent with reality through praxis (Dubatti, 2020).

For more than two decades, there have been open discussions on whether the research of the arts contributes to modes of knowing equivalent to those of science, or whether it would be necessary to recognize its own contributions. As an example, in *The Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research* (AEC et al., 2020), it is ensured that artistic research meets the five main criteria that constitute Research and Development in the *Frascati Manual* (2015). This includes: to be novel, of original hypotheses, uncertainty regarding the result, be systematic, and reproducible. These criteria also make it possible to “building links with business and enterprise in order to stimulate the impact of research” (p. 2).

In contrast, other artists, and critics demand recognition of the axiological, non-parametric value of artistic production, because its contributions are not measurable or demonstrable, as we can follow at the *Manifesto of Artistic Research* (Henke et al., 2020), or in the response made to the Vienna Declaration by Florian Cramer and Nienke Terpsma titled “What Is Wrong with the Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research?” (Cramer & Terpsma, 2021).

Faced with these different approaches one can ask, What role do arts and aesthetics play in the path of academic research? Because if what matters is applied art for intellectual, or scientific production, then it would seem that there is no real interest in art. But, if there is interest in art, it is necessary to identify how research that relates to art differs from scientific research, and what academic research contributes to art. This is crucial to resolve before affirming that it meets criteria of scientific and humanistic research, since there is not even a consensus on the type of knowledge it provides or the constancy, or consistency of its results.

Here, art is not considered as research as understood in any scientific discipline, nor in the social sciences. It will be necessary to insist that art does not develop like methodological research processes, this is because the first is messy, it jumps, it is



Figure 1. Screenshot: Gómez, S. (2021) *Text 1. Rehearsal for a Choreographic Utterance no. 01* [video]. Work in progress documentation. <https://youtu.be/YFUQophjGxg>

random, and it is not always conceptual (Henke, et. al, 2020; Vilar, 2015). Whereas methodical research, for its part, aims to collect data from the environment and corroborate it, it is based on observation and measurement to get to know its object of study, even if there is no claim to full objectivity.

Although art participates in *the human need of the knowing*, which is the reason for all research, this does not limit it to being a means or a producer of knowledge. The difference is that the need to know, or *Eros*, may be its cause, but knowledge itself will not necessarily be its ultimate goal. Art has its origin in the human effort to know what surrounds us and gives us meaning, not to assume what it is just because it is there (Hegel, 1826/2006). I am not referring only to conceptual knowledge, but to that which includes understanding, intuition, and experience about what reality presents to us. Art production would arise from the expression of a question, implicit or explicit, that the *being* asks themselves about what exists, and the need to materialize their intuition about it.

We can say that the problems of the universe of art are not limited to themselves; general problems that are raised in other disciplines of human knowledge can be also addressed from the arts. Something that already points to the horizon of possibility of research *in art* is that the way in which art poses

its problems is similar in some cases to the ways in which philosophy poses questions about the world, although not the way in which it solves those questions. This is especially so, since the middle of the 20th century, when art makes observations of its own depth on its plastic matter, when the content-form relationship began to unite conceptual and aesthetic problems on the plastic matter (the conceptual art of the 1960s, for example).

Art approaches to research in a special way when it borrows ways of seeing and searching from other disciplines, such as philosophy, to observe and experiment its object of interest. We can return to the three issues of artistic research indicated beforehand, but now taking into account this philosophy-art complicity: The ontological issue, where art approaches things through a question, *What is it that I think I know*; the methodological, understood as the speculation which occurs by the artistic practice; and the epistemological, where the approach to the processes of philosophy allows that ambivalent results are transparent, which occur between silent expression -gestures-, and discursive development -signs-, the expressed explicitly thought.

An illuminating example is the work *Der Bau*, by Hito Steyerl (2009), in which symbolic production, the archive, and its reinterpretation are exhibited simultaneously on the *aesthetic surface*: sculpted material (intervened façade), and the historical

material (documents and the bricks brought from the labor camp in Mauthausen), are in view at one and the same time.

The approach of art to certain processes of critical philosophy in its research developments (Vilar, 2021), makes us think about the definition of research in a more elementary sense, closer to its etymology that derives from *vestigium*, a search for the *index* of what remains of the past event. Art and philosophy would ask more than about fixed objects, about verbs, actions, substances, for the soul of events which are behind the vestige. However, even though they share the object of their search, the artist works with what comes before the concept, the song before the name, the dance before the nomination (Rancière, 1998/2011).

If we refer to research in the scientific or academic sense, then art must be distinguished from it, as well as from philosophy itself, because although they share the same starting points—questions about reality—they do not share the same ends, because, for example, philosophy seeks conceptual answers, or sciences seek measurable, testable, and falsifiable results. In research *in* the arts, the ultimate interests of art cannot be modified by academic aims (this would result in research *on* or *for* the arts, or arts as a research tool in the interest of another discipline). There is a risk of reducing artistic practice to methodological processes, or as a tool for inquiry when one neglects that the intuition made explicit in a work of art, at the *aesthetic surface* (that is not necessarily a static object), is the place where a certain relationship with knowledge, or the production of thought, would take place (Vilar, 2021). However, artists who investigate, they need to allow themselves to be *contaminated* by the ways of knowing or doing that do not belong to art in order to penetrate their research in new ways; so yes, the aesthetic results can be modified, also at the epistemological approach.

Artistic processes are affected and enriched by the research processes that the artist borrows from other disciplinary fields in order to establish a new relationship with the object of interest and especially with the way in which they state about that object.

## Epistemological Implications

The arts do not pursue knowledge for the verification or measurement of what exists. We could

characterize them as that which is driven by questions or inquiries about how to think about the world (see, e.g., Bayer, 1961/1965; Vilar, 2007). In their approach to research—ways or methods that limit their creative activity in favour of reaching their end, the arts seek to present their findings on the basis of their aesthetic material, which, without reaching philosophical discourse, contains *epistemological implications or nuclei*. All artworks have these epistemological implications; they are undeveloped propositional nuclei, either because they contain the intuition of an idea or a presentiment that can become a thought but that still has to be developed.

Firstly, it would be necessary to recognize that the contributions of art do not only occur at the moment of its construction. (time valued by the performative turn of the arts), nor through its results (object or performance), but rather it produces what we would call outcomes in all moments of its existence, both in the construction process, in the conclusion, but also in the reception of, and interaction with, the spectators.

Not all research manages to establish itself as a work of art (in the same way, not all artwork establishes the same relation to specific types of research process). The research that becomes a work of art is that which operates as an *Aesthetic Idea*, in which many thoughts can be found, and can trigger many reflections, but none of them exhausts it, according to Kant, on the *Critique of Judgment* (1790/1987, §49).

This is specifically in relation to its identity as art, but within the processes of research *in* the arts it is thus necessary to materialize, to make perceptible some of those thoughts or reflections that trigger the aesthetic idea, to make them evident in the artwork itself. Research *in* art also throws its contributions into the whole of its temporal existence and presents epistemological implications like the work of art does. However, what would differentiate it from this is that the researcher wants to point out these implications and develop them on the *aesthetic surface*: sinking into the matter of the artwork, traversing back and forth the process of creation to bring to light the epistemological nuclei that occur inside it. With the *aesthetic surface* of artistic research, I am referring not only to the material that makes up an artistic object, but also to the assembly of written reflections, and any other way of establishing thought in communicable formats along with artistic expressions, thus giving rise to

a particular aesthetic matter, the body of artistic research.

Let us return for a moment, and answer the question: What exactly is an *epistemological implication*? It is the aesthetic manifestation of an experience, intuition, desire, or projection that raises epistemic nuclei to be developed. We find the paradigmatic example in the Greek myths. Let us think of the figure, Chronos (Κρόνος), the god of the crops that marked the passage of time, and who devoured his children. The epistemological implication present in the myth is not explicitly expressed, hence the idea of a nucleus, a seed that must germinate and finish exposing itself: the intuition of time, which implies finiteness. This could be intuited in the Hellenic myth, but not be conceptualized; it was developed in the later philosophical reflection of Greek thinkers about the inevitability of the passage of time, and death. The intuition of the eternity concept was present in the birth of Zeus, who is hidden in a cave so that his father, Chronos, does not devour him. Or the conception of a personified god who owns intelligence, and consciousness, in the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus, etc. (Gómez, 2022). If we find that epistemological implications are contained in art, then through the research process we can weave

art and philosophy (or art and science, or art and anthropology) together to open, or develop these implications.

An example is the doctoral thesis of the choreographer Paz Rojo, entitled *The Decline of Choreography and Its Movement: A Body's (Path) Way* (2019), in which she is not researching a fixed object, but dance in itself. Rojo was thus not only developing a dance, neither a writing exercise (a published book), but both, and also to shearing laboratories of movement, a web site, and a theatrical performance (named *Eclipse*). From these multiple epistemic and aesthetic surfaces, she wove the question about whether dance must be formally constituted, acquire an interchangeable, negotiable, and sellable (a choreography, she says), or whether it can be deposed while being created (Rojo, 2019). From Paz Rojo's research, we cannot distinguish artwork as an object, but rather as an assemblage in which the aesthetic surface is throwing its epistemological developments at different times, and on different platforms, giving answers from dance (art) as from philosophy (discourse and speculation). These answers are not each given on a separate unique surface (some in the text, the others in the performance) but in some way, an exchange occurs between them. Beyond the individual surfaces, they structure a whole that oscillates between the



Figure 2. Screenshot: Gómez, S. (2021) Text 2. Rehearsal for a Choreographic Utterance no. 01 [video]. Work in progress documentation. <https://youtu.be/PG4cOMRFOZE>



concept and the experience of the body before the concept and exposes a particular conception of dance.

The researcher's task would be to unravel that content, translating, and encrypting it through the creative process itself. Since there is no single verbal explanation that translates the content of art, the task of the researcher is to bring to the aesthetic surface the vast source of hidden reflections that occur in the process, the work, and even in the artistic object placed in a communication environment (e. g. as an exhibition). It is a coming and going of the processes from symbolic rationalization to conceptual rationalization, both occurring on the *aesthetic surface*. A new artistic configuration may be taking place here, because it raises aesthetic questions, such as: the way in which a thought has been exposed on a sensitive support modifies the particularities of its content, and its content alters the way in which the support can be shown in such a way that what is presented can even alter thinking, the environment or the époque (Déotte, 2004/2013). Borgdorff (2012) expresses it this way:

Concepts and theories, experiences and understandings are interwoven with art practices and, partly for this reason, art is always reflexive. Research in the arts hence seeks to articulate some of this embodied knowledge throughout the creative process and in the art object. (p. 7)

The aesthetic production of artistic research is the elaboration and exposition of the questions that the process, the artwork, and its reception entail in the same sensitive support. The questions are specified, defined, and thought about. They are developed, their implications are known, and new questions are raised through the sound, dance, plastic, or visual matter that the researcher produces.

### Eros, art, and research

Comprehending an aspect of reality not only leads to the fuller understanding of the concepts, but to the joy of approaching objects, when, for example, the goal of the *art that is related to research* is not the verification, but the presentation of an idea, the materialization of an intuition that arises from the love of what has been studied. A cognitive union could be established when, in the creative process, a true interest on the object itself is being expressed. A union in which something becomes

part of ourselves, as if the purely analytical distance between object and subject were overcome, and the object ceases to be a mirror of the subject's thoughts or desires, and a loving relationship is established between them.

To claim that love is responsible for such a research approach in the arts, we assume that, to know something, we must first recognize that we have not achieved it. In *The Symposium* (Plato, 385-378/1991), in the second part of the dialogue, 202.a, *Eros* is manifested as the desire to know. It is characterized, not as a force or impulse that is born of itself, but of the desire for the other. It remains intermediate between abundance and lack—the son of *Poros* and *Penia*—since the erotic impulse would be exhausted if one possessed what one desired.

We find pleasure from the very mysterious encounter with reality, which is not utilitarian. Pleasure affirms us in our relationship for what we can intuit about the world without overcoming its mystery (Tillich, 1955/2005). This is expressed in the creative gesture of the researcher when wondering about the object, they forms and unforms the artistic creation, in the attempt to unite their *intuition* of it with an aesthetic form, which allows it to become an object of thought.

To *intuit* means to see inside, an intimate seeing that is concerned with what that object hides; to search for what the form of the object informs us. In the platonic sense of eros “it is a seeing shaped by love” (Tillich, 1955/2005, p. 129). The ultimate reality that love discloses to us is “that which unites, which is eternal in and above the transitory things” (p. 129), that which reveals an inexhaustible fount that will suggest to us the form of the *idea* that will become aesthetic. To intuit implies suspecting that something remains, despite change; it is what Plato calls imperishable beauty, a dimension of phenomena that we cannot reach, which in turn indicates an infinite distance between one another. That is why the act of knowing is not exhausted in describing or measuring, rather it forces us to recognize the impossibility of possessing the object. The artist, while researching, carries out a creative action and along the way increases their interest and desire, and establishes a relationship with the object of inquiry. Plato first defines *eros* as a relationship, because love is not about an individual quality of the lover (Marrades, 1992), it occurs between the one who loves and what is loved. By this relationship the loved and the lover are distinguished but yet, at the same time, they are united; because to

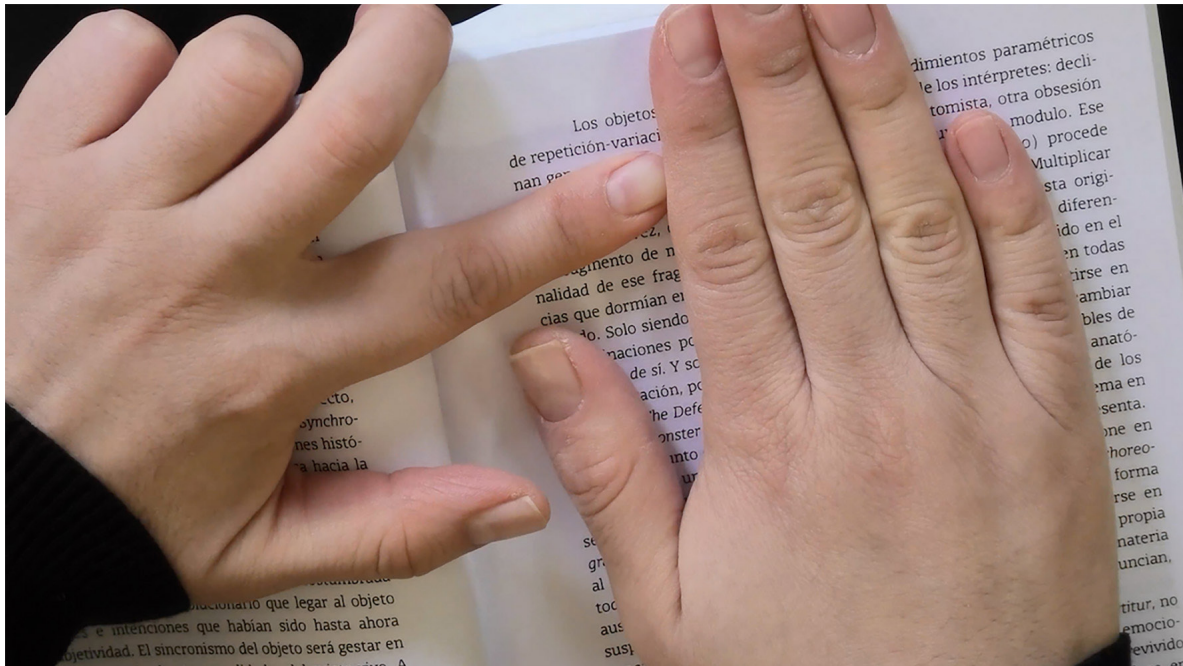


Figure 3. Screenshot: Gómez, S. (2021) *Text 3. Rehearsal for a Choreographic Utterance no. 01* [video]. Work in progress documentation: <https://youtu.be/mbG752RkcCk>

know, in the Platonic sense, is to go towards the permanent depth of things, which makes them what they are.

Research *in* art establishes a cognitive and joyful relationship with its object when the artist recognizes their impossibility of possessing the object. Thus begins an inexhaustible “research process” (Marrades, 1992, p. 14), which in itself implies a loving communion that unites imagination and reason. By returning here to this proposal of the rational and creative process that goes back and forth from the symbolic to the conceptual (mentioned above with the development of the epistemological implications), I point out the key to why love has a particular role in research *in* art.

Research *in* art, we said, uses various ways of inquiring about reality, borrowing tools from other disciplines and methods, looking for an expression that gives aesthetic shape to intuitions, and develops the epistemological nuclei, operating in the rational symbolic-conceptual dimension. In artwork, to recognize that symbolic and conceptual processes are brought united in the rational dimension, is to assume the union between intuition and thought, emotion and analysis, the cognitive and the aesthetic, within research *in* art.

The rational expressed there is an integral procedure that is not reduced to the ability to reason, nor

to its operational function. Reason here is similar to *logos*, in the sense of classical reason, which is not limited to discover the appropriate means to achieve ends but is united to love, whose object is an end and not a means. *Logos* is a union of reason and *appetitus*, or desire, as Thomas Aquinas understood it, that seeks the integration of what is observed and its good; because in *eros*, love is what leads towards the truth of things, understanding people or objects as the ultimate end of the process of knowledge, rather than knowledge itself (Tillich, 1972).

Subject and object are already becoming indistinguishable here. They participate in *eros* as the force that unites things that cannot be united (Plato, 385-378 /1991). *Eros* creates links between them without turning either into an object of possession.

The artistic research production displays its utterances, its assemblages, and expresses the loving interest in what is studied. Because, the artist gives to the object, already immersed in love, a new problematized unfinished body, which restructures an aesthetic to know or understand it from other depths. The artist researcher, in the assembly of their work, weaves the questions around their object without settling for a definitive answer, going beyond the control of data, and coming closer to our participation in the beauty and terror of the estrangement that things, and people, produce in us.



Research *in* art operates in the rational symbolic and conceptual dimension, understood as that in which conceptual knowledge and mute knowledge, if we steal Rancière's expression, a mute speech (1998/2011), are not opposed but are dependent on each other. Perhaps one relevant contribution of *art in which the research is displayed* is that it once again opens up the possibility of considering that the distance between what we research and ourselves can be overcome without the ontological distance ceasing to be real, because we will not possess the studied object, but we will be in communion with it. Even so, there is one threat which lies in directing the search towards the opposite of eros, utilitarianism (a mechanistic use, an extreme positivist approach, or an extra-activist strategy).

Research in the arts is a call to return to things, not to verify them, but to recognise what makes them exist, what sustains them, and unites us with them.

As poetry has described it, we drink colors and forms, forces and expressions. They become a part of ourselves. They give abundance to the poverty of our loneliness [...] Not all seeing has this character of union. If we look at things and observe them merely to control and to use them, no real union takes place. We keep them at a distance. We try to bring them into our power, to use them for our purposes, as means for our ends. (Tillich, 1955/2005, p. 128)

Research *in* art would then show us the possibility of uniting object and subject in a loving search for the object, an enquiry that does not place us above the object, but brings us to an *understanding* of it, as being *under* the place where knowledge is (Tillich, 1972). The union of subject and object is already initiated on the aesthetic surface where *eros* and *episteme*; art and *logos*; symbol and concept, meet. Choreographic action and philosophy question each other; as do archives and memory. With its loving cognitive attitude, artistic research can develop epistemological implications needed to bring new questions to the thinking processes, and resume the integration of knowledge (symbolic and conceptual), because knowing reality is never definitive; entities, phenomena, and intuitions are not entirely translatable to concepts. However, we continue in the attempt to discover, and to love, the knowledge they contribute with, as well as the truth behind them.

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