

# Practice: Critical<sup>1</sup>, Aesthetic Work in the Context of the Economic System and the Sciences.

Art as intervention and reflection, critique and policy in corporations and organizations. Criteria for successful partnerships—chances, possibilities and potentials.

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## 1. Introduction

*"The question is not what you look at, but what you see."*<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Art and culture as qualitative und normative concepts

*Art* can be considered as one of the unique collective terms in modern societies. Not only does it function as a diffuse placeholder for such diverse topics like cultural localization, individual abilities, general quality of life, qualitative judgments and social responsibility—to name just a few—but, despite this variety of definitions,<sup>3</sup> art denotes also a differentiated, independent social subsystem<sup>4</sup> whose specialization—or better: function—that appears incomprehensible<sup>5</sup> for a good proportion of the population, and with only a limited relevance to their everyday lives.<sup>6</sup> The rationale for this is not just based on linguistic traditions, instead, as is the case with in other situations in life too,<sup>7</sup> the factors determining the use of the term *Art*, and thus the way the phenomenon of art is perceived and understood, is based on an individuals knowledge and experience, habitual/ritual norms and situational communicative connectivity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As derived from the Greek *krínein*, this is to be understood as “considered differentiation” and not as “objection to” – as it is often misunderstood in everyday usage.

<sup>2</sup> Henry David Thoreau

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that these different appropriations have at least one factor in common: the expression of value and appreciation, and liberation from the profane. This expression thus serves qualitative judgements in discourses in diverse social contexts.

<sup>4</sup> See Luhmann, N. 1997

<sup>5</sup> See Latour, B. 1998

<sup>6</sup> One could take this as an interesting starting point for a discussion of the clandestine or even subversive effect of the arts.

<sup>7</sup> In general, human beings see and evaluate the things around them on the basis of what they already know, what confirms their assumptions, and strengthens their affiliation to their peer group.

<sup>8</sup> This should not be misunderstood as implying the creation of art “in the eye of the beholder,” but rather as the normative power of the masses. Here, language forms perception and vice versa.

There is a similarity here to the popular approach to the term culture, which is employed in a similar qualitative and normative way, often with the implication of an institutional entity, so that an understanding of it as a systemic and logical process is not being reflected in everyday life.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, culture is a community's process of creating values and meaning to form a society, and endowing them to its social, intellectual and emotional capital.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, when we think of art, we should not just envision objects, images, bodies and sounds.<sup>11</sup> Instead, we ought to imagine art as initiated processes and (human) interactions (encounters) with specific qualities and characteristics; and when we talk of culture, we ought to think of the interactions of diverse and different social processes. Even if this is far less “appealing” than wallowing in our memories of a tour in an art museum or our most recent “cultural trip.”

## 1.2 Culture is always associated with the economy

Obviously, a functioning community with laws and norms can only exist through social contracts (generally accepted agreements setting the basis for the process of formulating laws) which form the basis of a culture connecting us (the shared context of the social reality of life). Hence, an organized economic sphere with markets, binding contracts, securities and legal tender, property and companies with owners, shareholders and employees can only exist because of the basis provided by these socially valid agreements.<sup>12</sup> This may seem self-evident or even banal—but only until one turns to some of the unstable regions, some not that far away, or simply looks back somewhat in history.<sup>13</sup>

And, even if this does not sit well with some actors, including observers and viewers in the arts,<sup>14</sup> or contradicts their insular understanding of the world: artists do not exist outside society and culture is always associated in some way with the economy.<sup>15</sup> Their interconnection is no different from the interconnectedness of every other social subsystem<sup>16</sup> which then forms the fabric that—as the sum of all rituals of communication—we call society.

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<sup>9</sup> A position evident in the empirical cultural sciences which, for the sake of differentiation, use the term of “culture with a small c”

<sup>10</sup> In other words, communities are created and defined through the arts.

<sup>11</sup> These are artworks as exemplary representations of art. See also Eco, U. 1972

<sup>12</sup> When, for example, an investment banker taking part in the World Economic Forum said, “If you have four good friends and you like what you do, it's doesn't matter where you live,” this demonstrates first and foremost his or her shallow neoliberal understanding of community and culture, even though in the own process of forging his or her own identity, s/he was influenced by and profited from intact societies with collective memory and traditions, as well as intact legal and educational systems. If everyone were only to take their own circle of friends as their point of reference, never take any sustained responsibility for the social environment that frames their life, and were content with nothing more than the personal, momentary business success, there would be no modern innovative society, based on a division of labor and the balancing of risks, as a cultural community. Instead, at best, there would be tribal structures with oscillating loyalties.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to be misunderstood as a comparison with or evaluation of different cultures. It is, instead, only pointing out the impact which a loss of normative security can have.

<sup>14</sup> The beholders and viewers of art are also actors.

<sup>15</sup> One can regularly hear such statements made by artists, as well as cultural managers, art critics, and consumers. They express an escapist desire, and are based on a simplified notion of art which actually first emerged with the antiquated ways of conducting art history research and writing. Among other things, it presented artists as unworldly geniuses and ignored the knowledge and insights of social science and philosophy. Today, such notions continue to be propagated, often to further the interests of the art market and its hierarchies.

<sup>16</sup> For example, sports, the sciences, politics.

## 1.3 Stakeholders with (cultural/social) responsibility

Consequently, it is far from an optional luxury for stakeholders and institutions to act in a socially and cultural responsible way. Rather than being of relevance only after everything else is taken care of, social and cultural impacts are quite simply implied in all decision-making and essential for survival—once one starts to think beyond the next quarter's figures, the research budget or the salary check.

When art and the economy or the sciences interact, whether intended or unplanned, differences in views, expectations and rituals become especially evident—since they constitute different communication systems which, in order to cultivate their interrelations, need to develop modes of communication allowing them to relate beyond the limits of their own definitions. This process also involves evaluations and decisions based on a diverse set of values and a weighing of interests which influence the meaning, use and outcome of these cooperations on an essential level.

In the following, I would like to discuss a number of topics and offer a selection of elemental and thought-provoking comments and remarks that have proved helpful in my practical work as an artist in the sciences and economic environments. Due to the format of this publication, these observations are far from being comprehensive, let alone complete. Instead, they are intended to provide an insight into the complexity of the practice and seek to constructively engage with some of the common misunderstandings and (self-)constraints.

## 2. Goal-orientation is thinking and acting within restrictions

### 2.1 Everyday life and efficiency or insight and efficacy

The common form of structured corporate policy is guided by various management approaches to describe problems identified in processes, to define one or more objectives, and map the efficient routes to realize these goals. Undoubtedly, this is a reasonable and sensible practice in many cases, especially when dealing with short-term, recurring tasks of a less complex nature, since it facilitates the use of lessons learnt and experience as practical everyday know-how and simplifies the coordination between the actors involved to increase efficiency.

However, this form of goal or target orientation is often counterproductive when it comes to those processes and visionary ideas which an institution is seeking to develop as knowledge (competence) beyond its present everyday needs. This equally applies even to such obvious topics as corporate development, interdisciplinary research, strategic measures or issues of sustainability, since a goal orientation places constraints on those essential experiences and insights which could be obtained from a more open approach, i.e., one that is multi-perspectival and multi-disciplinary. This latter approach offers the chance of breaking out of the ritualized practices used in such cases in a business environment to work towards an expanded horizon of solutions. In this process one might, to mention just a few options,<sup>17</sup> differentiate between the formulated, i.e., official problems, individual and subjective perspectives, and the socio-dynamic implications of those involved, integrate informed and uninformed views and take into account the internal

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<sup>17</sup> To improve readability, I have omitted a systematic and comprehensive list of the factors which are influential here.

and external effects (meanings) and reflections on various time horizons, all of which can significantly influence the setting of priorities and approaches to solutions and, sometimes, the original goal itself.

In other words, adopting a narrowed goal orientation at an early stage represents a self-imposed restriction prompting outcomes within existing patterns of thinking and perpetuating habitual constraints in processes and hierarchies.<sup>18</sup>

This is even more pronounced if such an approach is applied to cultural and social issues, rather than the everyday business-related processes described above. These issues distinguish themselves by their far greater complexity of interaction and a vision beyond everyday corporate processes. After all, in principle, every decision (whether on a business or personal level) also has an impact on the social and cultural context. Although it may still be possible to largely ignore this (for the time being) when it comes to everyday issues of (seemingly) less complexity, the sum of individual decisions nonetheless has a power and consequences which can lead to a surprising interplay and correlations, and thus outcomes, if one does not take into account the cultural and social implications in decision-making.

## 2.2 Multi-perspectivity and basic research

On this basis, then, if one does not want to pursue such trivial objectives as specific marketing operations, motivational training for employees, beautification measures, confirming personal self-esteem or social distinction, the aim in the arts and of cultural projects is particularly to further open up the horizon of expectations of potential outcomes and insights (cognizance). Since the interactions between the arts and the economy and the sciences involve systems with a set of categorial differences,<sup>19</sup> the issues and topics being negotiated have the potential to be broader and more essential, integrate a multi-perspectival view, create approaches to deal with complexity, and offer a critique of the questions of meaning and significance both as an individual as well as on an organizational level.

A successful interaction with the arts can be more appropriately compared to basic research than product development; the indirect or processual value<sup>20</sup> is more important than the direct or planned use,<sup>21</sup> and the art process integrates the context itself into the artistic work (recursion), whereby the company or business would also become the object of a participatory gaze (research).

Hence, anyone employing the arts and cultural projects merely for ornamentation, illustration,<sup>22</sup> or as a social marker, i.e., in a specific goal orientation, is not leveraging the very real potential in conscious cultural controversies and artistic, aesthetic skills and processes. Only by breaking out of the habitual problem-and-solution patterns and self-constraining process strategies and adopting an approach of explorative action does it become possible to gain unplanned and unanticipated insights and knowledge as an enriching personal and institutional experience and an expansion of set horizons.

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<sup>18</sup> See Canetti, E. 1960

<sup>19</sup> See Luhman, N. 1994

<sup>20</sup> It is, of course, often far easier to engage on this level, since it is far more tangible, both conceptually and physically, but it harbors the danger of being distracted from the essential elements.

<sup>21</sup> Here, I deliberately refer to a utility of art—in the sense of its functions in society.

<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, of course, artistic works which are seemingly only ornamental may also bear within themselves a potential effect going beyond that. One important question which artists need to ask themselves here is at which point in the process of its reception and effect do they (or their work, as may be) surrender control to other subsystems and their criteria.

## 2.3 The sciences and transdisciplinary research and teaching

Aesthetic and cultural criteria play an eminent role in teaching since the process of learning is intrinsically based on cognition and perception. Teaching is—as (instructional) guided learning—the consolidation of the process and the assessment of primary and secondary experiences, i.e., the directly experienced and the mediated. Hence the questions on a re-evaluation of aesthetic criteria in the processes of apprehending and comprehending arising in the educational sector and in the sciences (in addition to those addressing the organizational level as such) in terms of culture and society<sup>23</sup> as is evident in current research into and debates on online/distance learning and MOOCs and the deliberations on classroom teaching,<sup>24</sup> as well as in the reevaluation of cross-sectional disciplines, interdisciplinary competences and the organization of think tanks.

The abilities of abstract and associative thought have been acknowledged as key skills for a long time; lateral thinkers and generalists are now being seen as necessary additions to specialized experts in building functioning organisms/infrastructures of communication and interaction.

In this field of transdisciplinary (i.e. beyond disciplinary limitations) teaching and research, cultural perspectives and artistic and aesthetic abilities offer the potential to reflect on and open up the horizon of action. In this process, art contributes—for it to be relevant—an essential transformative process and not merely a representative one.<sup>25</sup> Examples include the integration of artistic elements in foundation and postgraduate studies outside art's actual subject area, as well as aesthetic facilitation and relations to qualitative research, action research and artistic research.<sup>26</sup> In particular, scholarly research can benefit from integrating the critical perspective of qualified artists, since the academic specialist might take a utilitarian view of details, while the artist can add a layer of subjective, cultural relevance to the topic.

## 3. Seeking to avoid risk is taking the greatest risk

### 3.1 Perception and valuation

As in all enterprises, dealing with the arts also raises the question of the meaningfulness of this undertaking and how to appraise its utility. These questions are certainly justified—and rather simple to answer.

Here too, the rule applies that the criteria underlying any such assessment determine the outcome—actually rather a trivial insight. Nonetheless, it represents one of the most common errors in reasoning both

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<sup>23</sup> The etymology of this term contains a clear reference to the process of attaining insights.

<sup>24</sup> Through my involvement with instructional design—one of the more recent disciplines that (ideally) deal with educational issues beyond the (technical) design of strategies of dissemination—at Harvard University, I have been able to observe some of these implications.

<sup>25</sup> The right choice of participants is crucial to facilitate this, but above all the artists themselves need the right skills, though these are unfortunately not always appropriately fostered in art colleges.

<sup>26</sup> Approaches and modules which I have developed and put into practice in cooperation with research projects and faculty in various departments at colleges are directed to experimental explorations and the simultaneity of different systems and their criteria, as a critical method of dealing with complexity.

by businesses and cultural practitioners, and hence gives rise to a series of misunderstandings and communication problems.

A reasonable and meaningful appraisal crucially requires clarity for the period under consideration of the quantitative and qualitative aspects, personal and institutional perspectives and expectations, the horizon of effects, socio-dynamic factors as well as inclusive, exclusive and (not least) indeterminate factors.<sup>27</sup> Hence, only a considered view from the perspectives of all the social subsystems involved can facilitate sufficient awareness (valuation) and insight (understanding)—this multi-perspectivity, generated through the process of social differentiation, is an essential field of action for a systemic approach to artistic work and imperative for (critically) including the arts in a way that respect their value in the various areas (social subsystems) of life.

### 3.2 Failure due to the wrong criteria

It may be useful to offer some simple examples of how this will not work.<sup>28</sup> First, it is a mistake to believe that actively engaging critically with art as an element of socially-directed cultural activities automatically leads to a positive business result. Classic business accounting methods not only entirely lack the criteria to include the impact of aesthetic work and thought,<sup>29</sup> but are also often based on a time period which is far too short for culturally valuable effects to become tangible.

If a corporation were to adapt the objective of a cultural project to fit the assessment approach in the classic model of financial controlling, this would likely result in some form of profane marketing operation which compares a short-term increase of expenditure with potentially higher sales.

If a scholarly research group were to invite artists to transform the research findings into images and present them in a publication, or to attract the attention of a broad audience through an art exhibition, this may well be interesting in terms of its illustrative quality. However, through the implicit hierarchy between the content and its representation in this setting, art would be reduced to a mere medium.<sup>30</sup>

If a business working with specific materials or semi-finished products were to look for an artist to produce works from the same materials or from the semi-finished products to create a connection with a core element of the company, it would be making a simplified selection based on what is actually a rather unimportant criterion, in this case the materials and medium being used. And by making that simplified choice, far more important questions of cultural activity, which could be far more important for the company's environment, might be neglected. This would, moreover, further strengthen an already dominant element in everyday business life and fixate on one medium rather than open up the perceptual faculties for the new and different, and for questions of relevance and meaning.

Through participating in a cultural project, a corporate employee may have some crucial subjective experience on a personal level which may have no direct relationship to his or her attitudes and conduct at work but which could prove vitally important in his or her private life. An outcome like this would likely not be uncovered with an employee appraisal or evaluation, yet via the detour of the personal milieu it could

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<sup>27</sup> See Wittgenstein, L. 1963

<sup>28</sup> Even if the examples appear rather stereotyped, I have been told these and other stories in similar versions over the years by disappointed businesses and cultural practitioners.

<sup>29</sup> The same applies to the triple bottom line accounting model.

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, artists often borrow quotations from scholars and scientists to provide a rational setting in which to contextualize their works, or misunderstand the forms of cooperation offered as artistic research. The correct approach is to foster interdisciplinary cooperation which combines know-how with the aesthetic abilities of know-what and know-why.

have an impact on the urban and regional structure of society and thus on the corporation. If one started from the erroneous assumption that a change has to be directly identifiable at work and, possibly, within a short period of time, the results would be more than disappointing.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, one of the particularities of dealing with art lies precisely in its individual nature, which means that it is only controllable to a certain extent. Moreover, since its effect emerges over a longer period of time, it does not simply conform to the spirit and requirements of a community or the guidelines of an institution.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, the attempt to instrumentalize art prevents using and benefiting from its intrinsic qualities. Utilizing cultural projects to make members of staff better employees<sup>33</sup> would be nothing more than an educational measure, and the use of art as an imaging medium to convey content created by someone else would be nothing else than propaganda.<sup>34</sup> Both of these would contradict the ability of the arts and practical work in aesthetics to deal with complexity and multi-perspectival questions of relevance and meaning.

### 3.3 Assuming responsibility

A key feature of cultural processes in society is that their effects are only noticeable as fundamental changes over a medium to long-term span of time, even though often the traces of their influences may already be directly perceptible. As a result, to employ the catchwords so popular in CCR and CSR as an example, the location factor of a region in 5-15 years is determined by the actions taken today, and the changing modes of dealing with theater and literature, the reappraisal of the private and public, and the shift in the weighting of mediated and immediate experiences have a direct effect on the soft skills of the coming generations.

So, if a company adopts a longer period for review and expanded criteria on a case-by-case basis in order to appraise meaningfulness, it has moved on from the short-term goal of a return-on-investment target in favor of appreciation and understanding. It is then seeking to be part of an overall social structure and, through its cultural engagement, is actually assuming corporate responsibility.<sup>35</sup> This decision for the company to adopt the perspective of a zoon politikon, to be part of a political community, is the first step out of the trap of a reductionist capitalist mentality and utilitarian actions.

### 3.4 Experimenting successfully in the present

Of course, the effects and insights of successful cultural involvement are directly experienceable, since one of the key characteristics of the aesthetic process is its (multi-sensual) direct experiential nature.<sup>36</sup>

The decisive factor here is that in interacting with art its premises are also included, facilitating a discourse between the reference frameworks of art, economy and the sciences. This process is informed by the qualities of exploring and experimenting—with an openness as to the outcome, the incremental acquisition of insights, the process-oriented logic, the recursion to the established, the assessment of

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<sup>31</sup> Possibly—and that would be a genuine insight—also in the sense of overcoming self-deception.

<sup>32</sup> One could read this as one of the freedoms of the arts.

<sup>33</sup> For example, motivating them or encouraging a strong identification with the company.

<sup>34</sup> See Agamben, G. 2004

<sup>35</sup> The same also applies, though, for artists, since these do not assume social responsibility through their profession, but through their actions.

<sup>36</sup> This is precisely what is defined by the concept of the aesthetic: perceiving as multi-sensual experience and agency.

planning and intuition, reasoned and argumentative communication, transformations between subjectivity and objectification and critical reflection. It bears in itself the possibility of the crisis, though understood as the welcome transparency of communication and the potential of failure, as a clarity of cognition and insight. Here simultaneous processes and their interdependencies, relations between value systems in the sense of second-level observation, and a critical dialogue between unequivocalness and complexity are being considered.<sup>37</sup>

Only by first accepting these risks of the indeterminacy of the outcomes, the relativization of rituals and rules<sup>38</sup> in the familiar surroundings, and an openness to define the unanticipated and unplanned as a success,<sup>39</sup> can conditions be created for aesthetic insights and cultural discovery.

## 4. Culture is dealing with complexity without a comprehensive answer

*"Reality is, in truth, just one reality."<sup>40</sup>*

### 4.1 Process-oriented artistic practice

From a societal point of view, art has a key relevance: Art is a means to pursue the cultural questions posed about interrelations, perceptions of realities and meanings (critique and value formation) in an aesthetic mode of working. It is a multivalent communication (communication system) which, through a varying contextualization, evades a specific translation (interpretation) and, in this way, forms a resource for reflection—on the personal level, through the beholder, and on the societal level, as a system.

In terms of the progressing differentiation of art systems (horizontal differentiation), this is accompanied by a shift of emphasis so that its focus is not (any longer) on the production of objects and in particular their display in art contexts (labelled as such). Instead, what is now its focus is the designing of processes influencing developments as well as the integration of a range of disciplines. Rather than artists being the experts on questions of design, they are now being inquired as experts on issues related to perception and its relating. As a result, perceptual (aesthetic) skills and their artistic application in social contexts (relating) represent a crucial ability, and the medium and the canon of media becomes secondary.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> This implies a conscious approach to dealing with the economy and the sciences, and anything but "surrendering" art or the artist to them. Nonetheless, in the sense of a pseudo-radical understanding of art, one repeatedly finds artists working in a process-oriented form being accused of heresy in the arts and art criticism, while those who, for example, exhibit in a company's foyer or sell their works to the company without asking any questions are held up as examples of independence. Under certain circumstances, there may be concrete political interests behind such judgements, since often enough curators and art critics form a powerful interface between those working in the arts and the relevant opinion makers. See also Sloterdijk, P. 2000

<sup>38</sup> This refers to cohesion or autonomy.

<sup>39</sup> See Rancière, J. 2005

<sup>40</sup> D. Granosalis, see also Watzlawick, P. 2002

<sup>41</sup> See John, R. 2004

## 4.2 Entrepreneur and Entre-penseur<sup>42</sup>

Here are a few examples arising specifically from questions related to the situation (milieu), location and external elements and which also represent individual artistic positions as well as integrate other disciplines and an expanded context:<sup>43</sup>

A company's presentation and exhibition room is converted to investigate questions relating to the room's meaning as a place of representation, research into the hierarchies of resource distribution in the group of companies, and consider the integration or differentiation between public and private use.

Instead of presenting what has already been achieved and business successes, a corporate publication is dedicated to opening a debate on the meaning of social participation and sustainability, seeking to give a contextualized assessment of own actions, and integrating deviating positions.

The communication between an organization's departments is the basis for intensifying (transparency) and politicizing the on-going processes and the vocabulary being used, and the experience is facilitated by processing this artistically.

The spatial conversion and installation of a new floor is used to highlight inclusion and marginalization, as well as to elucidate possible changes. In this process, the depiction differentiates between a subjective perception and empirical data gathered.

An orientation system in the buildings belonging to a research facility poses questions about the invention and use of images, and employs inspirational indirect routes and critical direction indicators to counter the goal-directedness of task completion.

These cases deal with projects with diverse forms of participation<sup>44</sup> and decisions on situations, media, timeframes and impact that adopt a process-oriented approach. As artistic interventions, and as (semi-)permanent installations and performative elements with a variety of participants, these projects facilitate questions about actions and attitudes (individual, institutional, social),<sup>45</sup> as well as critiques (problem or crisis)<sup>46</sup> and, as moments of clarity (knowledge),<sup>47</sup> leading to insights (and hence implicit demands<sup>48</sup>). Here, though, it is not the task of art to primarily develop results in the sense of solutions or to reconcile the irreconcilable, but to contribute to a critical perception and the contextualization of simultaneous validities, that also play parts in changing or determining outcomes.

<sup>42</sup> For quite some time I have used this conceptual pair, to explain and clarify the criteria of cooperation with companies and institutions. Through the etymology of the concept of an "undertaking" in the sense of an enterprise it allows critical aesthetics to be grasped as a designing idea and its contextualization.

<sup>43</sup> Here, I only briefly include one or two examples without going into details; a comprehensive description of the processes, considerations and measures would not be possible within the scope of this text.

<sup>44</sup> But they do not turn employees into amateur artists, as unfortunately is all too often the case in "art inside/within the company" projects, or misuse them as accessories or accomplices, but integrate them with their desires, capabilities and potentials.

<sup>45</sup> See Horkheimer, Max; Adorno, Theodor W. 2002

<sup>46</sup> It is, though, too simple if one only uses art as a means for breaking the rules symbolically as a protest or as a simple provocation, since breaking rules is only an impetus to reflection and not yet reflection itself—and the aim should be to support reflection from an artistic perspective.

<sup>47</sup> For example, aiding the question "what is done?" by adding "how is it done?".

<sup>48</sup> See Kant, I. 2000

## 4.3 Art is societal reflection

In contrast to consulting projects and personal coaching (which is, unlike art, committed to the well-being of the clients and the inviolability of the person simply through their professional ethics) or tightly controlled creative processes as, for example, Design Thinking, art is—as a *conditio sine qua non*—as systemic artistic work and critical aesthetics (and, in a specific way, artistic research) neither focused on finding solutions within the framework of a task or a problem nor on the clients room for maneuver. Instead, art acts with a self-claimed freedom from the above constraints and integrates the in-situ situation and its own actions within into its reflection/considerations. This also means that artistic actions in this context inherently require a critical attitude and resistance since they associate premises (canons of values) and rituals of diverse social subsystems and, in this way, contextualize them culturally. In the relativizing of moral and ethical imperatives and in its conscious breaches of ritual (rules) and laws, art can initiate critical questions on the status quo of drawing boundaries (taboos), which then can be reflected and altered in the artistic process (in conjunction with other disciplines). Placing art under the premise to act within the common ethical and moral standards takes away its potential to reference the Other (prospect of personal freedom) and hence its use as a (hard-hitting) source of knowledge and transformative power. The artists themselves as acting persons, however, are bound—as are all other actors—by the applicable ethical and moral canon of values (distinction between the work and the person).<sup>49</sup>

Hence, art and critical aesthetics represent processes of critical relationizing through the simultaneous validity of values and (societal) systems; or, to phrase it more lyrically, art encourages to pose questions as answers to questions.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Enhanced cognitive ability through cultural contextualization

In a simplified way, one can imagine a company being the equivalent of a micro-society—an organization (a system), which creates essential elements of self-referential contingency, i.e., regards itself as structured (efficient), compatible (capable of interaction) and necessary (effective), and hence as socially congruent. Just as in society in its entirety, key actions are ritualized and the criteria of perception and evaluation collectivized.

Since most companies do work that is existentially non-essential (needs orientation), they require a high level of knowledge and communication skills. This is achieved through the way the entrepreneurial activity is referenced with cultural value formation processes, social communication and interaction—in other words, it requires the company's (conscious) contextualization with society. The decisive element here is that the reflective process can only take place in distinction of contexts, i.e., in the differentiated evaluation of descriptions (constructions) of reality.

Despite this insight, the processes of innovation and raising of value-based questions in the corporate world often only start within a company's hierarchies and organizational structures. In fact, though, values

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<sup>49</sup> See John, R. 1999

are social constructions no matter whether in society or in the subsystem of a company, so they cannot be defined logically (in a useful way) if cultural categories are excluded.

In companies and organizations, systemic artistic work and critical aesthetics can support an aesthetic and reflexive creation process and mediation of insights and meanings. In this process, contrary to explanatory models and formalizations in the economic system and in the sciences, art does not work and act with simplifications (definitions) and hence limiting in its perception and reflection, but facilitates an indirect impression of complexity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See John, R. 2005

**Audience**

leaders and decision-makers in Corporate Governance, Corporate Cultural Responsibility (CCR), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), practitioners and scholars in the arts, art theory, cultural sciences, sociology, cultural engagement, art history

The original text has been adapted to the audience of this publication.

**Keywords**

Corporate Governance, Corporate Cultural Responsibility, Corporate Social Responsibility, Management, Change Management, Social Responsibility, Art, Artist, Artistic Research, Critical Aesthetics, Systemic Art, Interventionist Art, Artistic Intervention Aesthetic Intervention, Performative Art, Critical-Aesthetic Consulting and Coaching, Ruediger John