

NOTES on SARN "we, the public"

Introduction 26th of April 2012 in Södpol Luzern

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First of all thank you for coming tonight. It is wonderful to see you all and we are delighted at the large interest in the conference and very much look forward to this evening and tomorrow.

We are all impatient to get to Prof. Maharaj's keynote speech – at least I am – so this is just to inform you of three points:

- *Background of the conference*
- *The organisation of tonight and tomorrow*
- *The title "we, the public"*

The intention of this conference is to offer you a platform for contact, discussion and dialogue about the practice; your practice of current artistic research, whether you are an artist, a partner in this work or part of an interested public. The conference also states that the artistic research, which is being done by the artists, demands that time is spent on it, looking and thinking, and discussing it in an open environment.

SARN (Swiss Artistic Research Network) has been active as a formal network for over a year now. We seriously understand this as a network, which acts from the grassroots: the people who carry out the research.

We work to integrate the material, the reality and the practice of artistic research as it is conducted by artists in Swiss art schools and make it visible and exchangeable so that it can add to the debate and intensify the practice.

This is so to speak, '*real-politik*'. Looking at that which is there and how it can lead to something more. It is about grappling with the uncanny mix of facts and visions or intuitive intentionality, which is at the core of art and of art based research.

For the past year SARN has conducted unpretentious workshops – afternoons of presenting and considering what the very different projects happening right now are about. These workshops explored/raised many of the following questions: What does it really take to "handle" projects? What kind of data is created? How and in what do artists invest their time and life when they make research as well as "just" art? What is the artist researcher's life in the agora – the public space? This acting and

interacting, reflecting and making artists' competences as professionals visible, seems to be the convincing specificity of artistic research as opposed to the autonomous art-work. Artistic research is therefore processed in a context of deliberate discussion.

These attempts of the Swiss Artistic Research Network at inter-school communication were successful, and they form the basis for this conference. We wanted to make a format, which – although we call it a conference – moves the academic framework from a space of a certain type of reproduction to one of concrete interaction. I will come to how we intend to do this in a moment.

We have a considerable amount of luxurious space and possibility in Switzerland. It however comes with quite a lot of control via budgets, formulas, deadlines, and a way of thinking structured by work-packages, milestones and promised outcomes. This is a fairly complex framework which does not really create a space of peer competition, but rather one of bureaucracy and – I am told by friends in business management – a now old fashioned fixation on productivity/turnover rather than a focus on the results and on far-reaching outcomes.

Sometimes it seems there is an "unholy alliance" between the unending discussions about what artistic research really is and who should decide (of course its not possible to remain outside of the discussion) and the administrative demand for assurance that there will be a fast and, for everyone, not too provocative or dangerous outcome. The applications procedures and methodology debate becomes a sort of golden cage or a rubber cell – definitely a strange kind of comfort zone – which some use a lot of energy beating against and others feel very comfortable in. Neither position is really ideal. Or are we here in a circus spending too much time fixing holes in the security net rather than training our muscles to do the actual artistic high-flying acrobatics? The hours we spend at this conference should maybe be more about training together than about securing the net.

The Keynote

By asking Sarat Maharaj to start us off, we have in our midst a person who has helped many open up to an understanding of the potential knowledge "production" appearing within artistic research as a "detournement of ready-made knowledge systems". A flip-over and displacing of structured data and information, dissolving them as they try to settle and fix into institutional disciplines. Indeed a high wire act, which takes both daring and practice.

As you can sense it is not a question of leaving form, the issue is to really look in a concentrated way at that which is essential and present. Seeing it as the form and not leaving it to abstract structures or ideologies to allow definition. We are very happy and honoured that Professor Maharaj is here tonight to deepen aspects of this work, which is always related to the reality of practice.

The Venues

We have five different rooms or spaces at our disposal for this conference. All the venues are or have been in some way places of artistic production. Today we are here at Südpol this wonderful house of cultural production at the fringe of Luzern. You have all seen the bookshop by Winfried Heiniger and the school publications here and the screens with the "posted presentations". At first the term *poster presentation* created some anxiety, because one does not confine projects to *posters* in the arts, but the challenge brought us the interesting possibility of testing the new online research catalogue format (www.researchcatalogue.net) and allowed us a 'win/win' situation where we could have presentations which aren't fixed in a timeline and for the presenters to also have a result which can be useful for them beyond this conference.

Tomorrow in the morning we will offer the walk along the Lucerne Quai and the Lake to the Palace Luzern where Prof. Florian Dombois will talk in the lobby of the classy old hotel about the aforesaid research catalogue and the JAR Publication. Art also happened at the Palace; Two years ago the hotel withstood Zoe Dowlen's "*First Ascent of the Palace Hotel, Luzern*", in which she climbed the façade as part of her master thesis work "*The Intertextual Tourist Tearoom Archive*". And, though you do not see it at first glance, the hotel is also the first larger reinforced concrete building in Switzerland.

At the hotel you will sign up for workshops, please have a look in the program today to plan your choices.

From the Palace Hotel, Luzern we spread out into the city – the Erfrischungsraum, which is the school gallery, the Heiliggeist chapel where, another of our artist researchers; Miriam Sturzenegger was responsible for the wonderful installation of Alvin Luciers Empty Vessels, which you see in the program picture, and finally the Terrace of the Luzern Art Museum, where we will also have workshops and the final discussion enjoying the grand view under Jean Nouvel's even grander roof.

There are nine workshops, and it has been essential to us that this is not just a presenter/audience confrontation, but rather embodies the dialogue I spoke of at the beginning. All presentations have a moderator, a person who has prepared for the presentation, who may ask questions along the way and hopefully open the format even more. We wish to give the audience authentic access to considerations of practice, methods and impact, thus allowing a dialogue to develop.

We will have time enough, about twenty minutes, for the project presentation and about thirty minutes for discussion of central points. We expect people to stay in one venue attending the two morning workshops and change around for the afternoon workshop. Except for the time between the workshops in the morning we have ample time for individual conversations and, as the program is not overloaded, we will still be fresh and alert for the responders' inputs and the closing discussions at four in the art museum. It is of great importance that we filter out and use the conclusions from the keynote lecture through to the workshops and reflect upon which themes are of central relevance to the development and understanding of artistic research here and now.

We are sure that each workshop will distil a theme or an issue about artistic research and show us an approach to the role of artistic research as part of the public sphere.

In order to focus on this we have invited responders who have experiences both in the academic field and deal actively with the public realm; Raimi Gbadamosi and Roza El-Hassan as artists and Lysianne Lechot Hirt as a 'go-between' between design and art. They will accompany the workshops and give us statements at the end to help us pull the threads together.

And finally there is the title: "we, the public" we have cheerfully announced this for months now. Some of you may hear the echo of the preamble of the American constitution, the founding fathers as a group asserting responsibility for forming a perfect union. Or you may be reminded of how in the realm of science it has been defined a necessary challenge in the past years to deal with "science in society". The title implies a collective interest or an interest in the collective, a will to be and act in the agora. And yet there is a distinction, maybe the comma brings it across, the necessary differentiation between art and life.

Focusing on workshops and practice makes this a working conference. We are lucky to have many students present and it is inspiring that we have the possibility to discuss the work which they are expected to engage with in public workshops where an equal footing is made explicit.

Before we go any further I would like to thank and present the SARN board: Flavia Caviezel; Priska Gisler; Federica Martini, Lysianne Lechot-Hirt and Christoph Schenker and Selma Dubach who will also be your guides and hosts. I would also like to thank Zoe Dowlen and Lea Küng who have spent the past two months preparing and working hard to make the ideas of this conference tangible, and the many student helpers who will assist throughout the conference.

We have provided a platform for many hours of work for all of us, but we hope curiosity will bloom and our time together will result in a kind of creative celebration!

We would like to thank Sarat Maharaj so much for coming to Luzern today. We are happy and honoured that he has agreed to speak at the conference. His impressive contribution to art and research is outlined in the program so I will only mention a few aspects: Teaching; As a professor of art history and Theory at Goldsmiths College in London from 1980-2005 and now as professor and part of the PhD Program at Lund University and Malmö Academy in Sweden he has brought important impulses to the development of an open discourse around.

Research; Sarat Maharaj's research practice has contributed to distinctive new and independent views on the fields of visual arts, textiles and themes such as North/South divisions of work, manufacture and creative labour and indeed artistic research. There is a most interesting article in a new book on artistic research "The Intellectual Birdhouse" an interview as introduction to his consciousness studies with the neurologist and Buddhist scholar Francisco Varela. And recently one of your texts accompanied the exhibition of the wonderful South African Photographer Santu Mofokeng, which could be seen in the Kunsthalle Bern this Autumn.

And you have curated exhibitions on most continents from San Paolo and Kassel to Guangzhou.

With your permission we will now go straight to your lecture.

Julie Harboe 26.4.2012