Curatorial Research-Creation.

Unsustainable Anomalies in Organization Studies.

Philippe Mairesse, ICN, CEREFIGE/University of Lorraine

Jean-Luc Moriceau, IMT Business School – LITEM

Pierre-Antoine Chardel LAB/IMT Business School - LAP

Isabela Paes, CPN & LITEM, Evry

Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, Stockholm School of Economics

New arts nouveaux in our times, as the pioneers did by end of XIX Century in Nancy and Europe, must reconnect to other disciplines and join forces in order to act against the unsustainable, the unbearable (Citton, 2012; Moriceau et al., 2023). This stream focuses on « research-creation », a recent trend in teaching and research, aimed at integrating the arts and the sciences including social sciences, with an equal (il-)legitimacy and dignity, for fostering a holistic knowledge, research and practice. Our endeavour is to think/play/design about how research-creation can act as a poison/remedy in the face of the unbearable/unsustainable of normal research not being designed to combat the unbearable (in organizations).

Research-creation is an emerging trend in academic research that links art practice and the art sciences to the interpretive and pure sciences, in order to generate new knowledge through social, material and performative practices. The term “Research-creation” was developed within Francophone academic research contexts, first in Quebec then in France (Manning & Massumi, 2018; Citton, 2018). It refers to a research approach that aims to integrate, through a back-and-forth dynamic, an activity of artistic creation along with a process of scientific knowledge production. More specifically, this method invites the researcher to conduct a creative process, to critically analyze it, and to invent news forms for its transmission. The results of this type of research are normally presented partly in the form of an artifact or an artistic performance and partly in the form of a theoretical write-up in conversation with scientific literature.¹ This approach is close to, and goes beyond the art-based research approach (Mairesse, 2019; Debenedetti et al., 2019). It tackles the issue of a holistic knowledge and relation to the word, a necessity for the ecological transformation of human societies (Shrivastava 2010).

However, research-creation continues to have a marginal position, and is therefore struggling to gain recognition. But remaining minor, in Deleuze’s sense, is undoubtedly a condition of its effectiveness and its own way of doing things. Hence its potential power to undermine the heart of normal science. According to Stanford Anderson, former architectural historian and professor at MIT, research-creation has the potential of undermining what sciences epistemologist Imre lakatos (1970) calls research programs: “What Lakatos terms the ‘hard core’ of a research program is accepted by convention and, during the pursuit of the program, the hard core is methodologically considered irrefutable. Now, quoting from Lakatos, the hard core, joined with a ‘positive heuristic,’ “… defines problems, outlines the construction of a belt of auxiliary hypotheses, foresees anomalies and turns them victoriously into examples, all according to a preconceived plan. … It is primarily the positive

heuristic of his programme, not the anomalies, which dictate the choice of his problems. Only when
the driving force of the positive heuristic weakens, may more attention be given to anomalies.”
(Anderson, 2011). Anderson used this to strengthen his conception of architecture as research,
mainly based on Le Corbusier’s inventions (note that Le Corbusier is a far follower of the Art Nouveau
approach where fine arts meets design, industry and access to the masses).

Research programs only care about anomalies when their positive heuristics weaken. Let’s recognize
and stem from the fact that sustainability concerns appear now (not only but also) because the
positive heuristic of our sciences, technologies and social theories are weakening and lacking
effectiveness to an unexpected extent. Many elements of the contemporary unsustainable and
unbearable may well result from their weakness in adapting, understanding and solving the
challenges of our times and the excesses of the human development at the expense of Earth. They
might also result from the continuous attempt to maintain such unsuccessful positive heuristics in
face of a growing number of anomalies. Isn’t there an urgent need to get away from the dead ends
and unbearable nature of classical logico-rational science? Research-creation turn each of us into
researchers and creators in search of solutions to reverse the unbearable (Citton, 2018). It aims at
turning theorizing into what Goethe called higher contemplation or perception (Uebel, 2022). It
questions the ontologies grounding the old-fashioned normative quantitative approaches, in order to
“curate” contemporary economies from the instrumental rationalisation that has taken the floor in
place of reason (Guillet de Monthoux, 2020).

Anderson (2010) states “the intellectual construct of research programs, and the quasi-autonomy of
its selective incorporation of externalities, can bring intellect and design and art to bear on societal
conditions”, aimed at “a more constructive, projective role of influencing future global practice.”
More than ten years later, these terms remain valid.

The standard approach has been seeing research-creation as the refounding of knowledge in our
field. Research should then include creation, not only of new concepts, but also the process of artistic
creation as research leading to knowledge. This amounts at:

- thinking of the creative process in terms of scientific research
- the exercise of a sustained artistic or creative practice
- the development of a discourse integrated with the realization of novel works or
  productions, or the implementation of new creative processes
- the transmission, presentation and dissemination of these works or creative processes to
  scholars, students, peers and the general public

A second approach sees research-creation as, above all, sketching out gestures, the seeds of thinking
in the act and thoughtful action (Manning & Massumi, 2018; Citton, 2012, 2018). Gestures that will
then be disseminated and hopefully reproduced, expanded and reinterpreted, passing from head to
head, from body to body, via affective and intellectual relationships, during events and encounters.
Research-creation would act less as a refoundation of knowledge than as a minor activism,
subverting the foundations and initiating gestures (of thought and action). “Making or creating
reality “ (Guillet de Monthoux in Mairesse, 2021), pointing in new directions without claiming to
rebuild an alternative hard core, instead it could provide a “reason to believe in small miracles in
everyday aesthetic surprises” (Guillet de Monthoux, 2020:23). May its power not remain hopelessly
on the fringes without occupying a place or becoming legitimate?

Such a “curatorial” research-creation approach can therefore contribute to the development of our
organization field, through the renewal of knowledge or practices, or through innovations of all
kinds; or to the subversion this field, through gestes and sketchings. Research-creation as curating
instead of curing, fundamentally implies sharing, and takes place through the creation of one or more communities of interest around the objects and processes of art and research (Pluta and Losco-Lena, 2015). It might concern topics that could not be addressed without engaging in some form of creative practice. It implies a creative process, an experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an integral part of the study (Sawchuck and Chapman, 2012). Curatorial research-creation is invested in process as much as product, and is often experimental in both art making and in forms of post-analytical writing, mobilizing affects and critical performativity (Linstead, 2018).

However, developing research-creation programs outside the art institutions, and especially in the field of organizational research and practice meets resistances and barriers. First the attachment to the positive heuristics of natural sciences by scholars and even practitioners in organization. Second the still active depreciation of art and artistic activity as “play”, entertainment, or innovation producers at the best. Third, the political resistance to approaches that could question and destabilize the dominant paradigm and evaluation criteria. Fourth, the disciplinary paradigm in research, preventing cross-, inter- or trans-disciplinary research. Fifth, the reluctance of artists to mix and interfere with the field of organization, that they identify with the producers of unsustainability and profit oriented thinking.

Thus, we call for actions, theories and proposal dealing for example with the following but not limiting list of themes:

- research-creation accounts in the most varied format
- artistic performances bringing in knowledge of different kind, or undermining the hard core
- art-science dual experiments on organizational issues
- empirical studies pointing at anomalies in the organizational life that cannot be tackled by the classical positive organization science heuristics
- theoretical critiques of organizational research programs and heuristics
- comparisons with, and challenges from the pioneers in Art Nouveau, Bauhaus, Black Mountains and other approaches
- proposal of research-creation programs and action at the intersection of the arts and organization sciences
- workshops

We conceive of this stream not only as a place for thoughts but a platform for future actions.

References


