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Art hyphen science

Moving through writings, writing, and practices

Where to start? As always, “it is best to begin in the middle of things, *in medias res*” (Latour, 2005, p. 27). In this article, I would like to take that advice literally. This is a mediation on *art-science* and my interest lies in the middle, with the hyphen. The hyphen is a generous punctuation mark. Rather indiscriminately it connects and separates. In this case, it connects *art* to *science* and vice versa. Simultaneously, the hyphen is what keeps them apart, suggesting that their distinctiveness is not entirely subsumed by the encounter. I would like to understand the traction that art-science has gained in recent years as a recognition that both art and science are not ‘sufficient’ in and of themselves. Art-science flies in the face of the well-known cries for ‘more autonomy’ or ‘more interdependence’, rather it is a search for *better dependence*. In my particular corner of the world, I have committed myself to that search as well.

In this article, I will draw on my fieldwork at the Rotterdam Arts & Sciences Lab (hereafter referred to as RASL). RASL is a consortium between three higher education institutes in Rotterdam: Willem De Kooning Academy, Codarts University for the Arts, and Erasmus University Rotterdam. They present themselves as the place “where arts & sciences meet” (RASL, no date). The institutions pulled together driven by the recognition that today’s “complex and multidimensional challenges”, as their website puts it, must be formulated and addressed in an imaginative, more-than-disciplinary manner (*Dual Degree*, no date). In that respect, they ideologically align themselves with scholars such as Gabrys and Yusoff (2012) and Galafassi (2018, p. 3) who stress the paramount importance of further engagement between the arts and sciences to enrich the imagination and “widen the range of problem framings and their solution space”.

The metaphor ‘bridging the gap’ is oftentimes called upon to make sense of the encounter between the arts and sciences¹. Pushing the metaphor further, I would say that my fieldwork took place in the gap. I was interested in exploring what it meant to do art-science in practice. By foregrounding materialities, practicalities, and events, the gap proved to be a more lively and densely populated place than the word *gap* (i.e., an unfilled space or interval) makes it out to be. Therefore, I decided to exchange the gap-bridging lingo for a flatter and more modest punctuation mark: the hyphen. I will, very briefly, outline three reasons for doing so. The hyphen, first, encourages us to notice the various relationships and connections holding an assemblage together. Second, the hyphen does not ‘fly above’, as a bridge would suggest, but lies flat in the

¹ I decide not to refer to any specific literature. My point is to draw attention to the pervasiveness of the metaphor, but I do not want to write ‘in opposition to’ anyone in particular. A quick search on the web will demonstrate the popularity of the ‘bridging the gap’ metaphor in relation to art-science initiatives.

field. It underlines the importance of keeping “the landscape flat” (Latour, 2005, p. 176). As field philosophers, we must cultivate critical scrutiny for the scales, abstractions, and theories we ‘bring to the field’. Do they leave enough space for the actors to deploy their own contradictory collection of instruments? Can we still ‘see’ their concerns and passions and their attempts at establishing and maintaining a variety of connections? Finally, as a literary device, the hyphen inevitably draws attention to our own (often-times obsessively *lettered*) inscriptions. As such, it is a call to be accountable for the accounts we produce.

Relieved from the demanding travails to ‘bridge gaps’ or ‘cross divides’, I could direct my attention to studying how the arts were hyphenated to the sciences in actual practices. But, as is always the case, questions continue to proliferate even when research is concluded. In this article, I mobilize my earlier fieldwork as a point of departure to think through the tangled interdependencies between art-science *in the literature* and art-science *in practice*. My own intervention in the literature is turned into an object of analysis, rather than merely the result of analysis. The question I pose in this article is: How to make sense of the oscillating movement between art-science in ‘the field’, art-science across various writings, and the practice of writing itself?

Relating to the literature

In scholarly writing, art-science is a contraction that refers, one way or another, to encounters across difference. The concept gathers ideas, practices, and theories affiliated with something called science *and* art. It is imagined to take place at an intersection, a contact zone, or an intermediate domain. Its liminal life is reflected in the literature on art-science, the writings are dispersed over different academic and non-academic journals and houses a rich ensemble of voices. This raises the question of how to relate to the literature written on this topic and how to use theory to understand “the emergent field of art-science” (Born and Barry, 2010, p. 104).

In moving through the literature, I could begin by trying to demarcate *what science is*. Perhaps I would evoke the work of Karl Popper (1959) who, in trying to set apart science from religion and superstition, stressed the importance of falsifiability. Or I could try to follow Lorraine Daston’s (2005) work and lay bare the historical tensions between the concept of *objectivity* and *imagination*. The latter became ‘relegated’ to the arts whereas the former was taken up as the organizing principle of a scientific way of knowing. As a next move, I could attempt an ambitious jump to Henry Giroux’s (2013) work on the “disimagination machine”. If I manage to weave a convincing thread, I could then use our current predicament, the “clusterfuck of world-historical proportions” (Van den Akker and Vermeulen, 2017, p. 17), to underline the urgency of working towards new ways of learning and knowing, and thus end up at art-science. But even if I find a readership generous enough to follow my argumentation, it does not feel right to evoke the literature in such a way.

It does not feel right because the level of generality would sit at odds with the care and attention I try to devote to ‘the field’ (see Mol, 2002, p. 6). In dashing through all those writings, I would leave too many voices unheard and too many complexities unattended. Why did you not relate to Thomas F. Gieryn’s work?, someone might respond. Or why did I fail to consider the material conditions in which a body of literature was developed? Questions like that would be wholly justified, but I do not want to write myself into a position where my article yields such responses. My concerns lie elsewhere. The arguments conjured up in the previous paragraph may be relevant and interesting to develop *in the literature*, but they hardly mattered for the actors I encountered in my fieldwork. An academic journal can be a productive locale to set up a controversy between different domains of knowledge production or to raise an opposition to then talk about bridging it. But in practice, there are often more appropriate ways of handling differences (Mol, 2003, p. 116) or the differences may not be as stark as they are made out to be.

In writing, it is possible to tie down rather recalcitrant and unruly objects. The various entanglements and manifestations of art and science can be quickly domesticated into Art and Science. If you push hard enough, surely, they will find their way into a Venn diagram. Sometimes that may be elucidating, but a bundle of light also obscures (Tsoukas, 1997). I propose to understand the oppositions and controversies we encounter in writing between the ‘two cultures’ (to once again dust off C. P. Snow’s (2012/1964) infamous exclamation) as narrative artifacts². That is not meant as a derogatory gesture. The artificiality of an artifact does not diminish its value per se. We left that idea behind us quite a while ago (see e.g. Latour, 2005, pp. 90–91). The chair on which I am sitting, the computer on which I am writing this text, and my field notes scattered over my desk are all artificial. A willingness to add difference in art-science writing to that list allows for a medley of new questions. It helps us to ask: Is it well constructed? What does this juxtaposition allow us to do or imagine? How do these differences matter? What concerns gave rise to its conception? And so on. Engaging with such questions makes capitalized conceptions of Art and Science tremble. Uppercases soon transform into lowercases. We can no longer mistake parts (*this* art-science) for wholes (*art-science in general*)³.

Let me return to the question that got us here: How to relate to the dispersed and varied literature on art-science and how to use theory to make sense of this emerging field? My literary companions with whom I do fieldwork (and thus write) can be partially accounted for by pointing to my theoretical cultivation and my biography. Instead

2 I use narrative artifact here with Mary Louise Pratt’s (1986) text in mind in which she discusses the *arrival trope* in ethnographic writing. The ethnographic arrival scene (with Malinowski as the prime example “Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village...”) brings as much to the fore as it obscures. We can ask: What does oppositional writing, where we hold one domain still to talk about the other, bring to the fore and what does it obscure?

3 Here I take inspiration from Irene van Oorschot’s (2021, p. 16) writing on the law.

of, say, Education Sciences or STEAM literature, my interests and education brought me to critical work from areas such as anthropology, sociology, and feminist STS research. My readings made me wary when it came to purified notions of knowledge domains. I was unwilling to approach art-science as the encounter between two *wholes*, now to be integrated into a new coherence. Reading about the imposition of neoliberal policies on our educational landscape and the decline of public education, I both welcomed art-science as an attempt to rethink our modes of teaching and learning and I approached it hesitantly. Would it be just another attempt to reorganize academia at the service of corporate interests? Would its transformative potential be smothered when it had to justify itself in the apparently neutral and benign language of quality, efficiency, and effectiveness? Old ideas parading as new ones, in other words, where students appeared as consumers and scholars as work units in need of incentivization.

My fieldwork could have been constructed as a way to demonstrate that, despite good intentions, art-science was a toothless opponent in the face of the totalizing powers of neoliberalization and audit logics. My research would then be the *Dutch case* of that story. This is to say that the theory I engaged with sensitized me to what I noticed and believed to be important in the field. But my ethnographic encounters and my normative commitment to my research made me choose a different path. I traced the concerns of a workgroup tasked with creating and maintaining an art-science Dual Degree program. They deal with the complexities of ‘the encounter between art and science’ on a daily basis. In their efforts to establish a new art-science intersection, they did not get overwhelmed by a “gulf of incomprehension” (Snow, 2012/1964, p. liii) nor were they subservient to neoliberal powers. Early in my fieldwork, I was surprised by how the members of the workgroup creatively engaged with audit technologies, those faithful errand-boys of neoliberalization, in order to anchor the new art-science curriculum. Incomprehension or logical incompatibilities, when they did occur, were not raised into conflicts. Complete comprehension or logical consistency, after all, was not an aim worth pursuing in practice. The workgroup was concerned with the success of their intervention: stabilizing a new art-science curriculum. The ability to shift between different registers and to distribute different ‘problems’ was a key resource for the workgroup. The art-science curriculum, which took center stage in my fieldwork, was one thing during an open day, something else when an audit had to be satisfied, and yet something different when grades had to be registered in the grading management software. It illustrates the distributed nature of reality, to put it in Anemarie Mol’s (2002, p. 96) terminology.

I thus could not present the members of the workgroup as mere bit players in a prewritten play. Neoliberalization and the proliferation of audit logics, well-developed in much critical work, remained a good ‘enemy to think against’ but it was not the destination of my research (see Vogel, 2021, p. 55). Not only would that have been an unfaithful description of my experiences in the field, but it would also be an unproductive re-description. In trying to understand and account for the performative effects of my knowledge practices (Haraway, 1988), I aimed to present an account that was attentive to the ‘cracks and the contradictions in the bloody system’ (to paraphrase Stuart Hall in

his last interview, 2016, p. 341). My normative commitment was then to explore how we could foster and create opportunities and modalities to *do art-science well* – and simultaneously put up for debate what this “well” should look like. In researching a situated appearance of art-science, adhering to the principle of symmetry (see e.g., Latour, 2005, p. 76), I hoped to bring different phenomena to the fore. How is art-science *done here?*, I sought to understand. The *here* in that question points to observations collected in numerous field notes and “provides an anchor in a conceptual space from which my analysis unfolds” (Vogel, 2021, p. 59).

For an article opening with the advice to start *in medias res*, it takes quite a while to “be in the middle of things”. That is no accident. I wanted to start “not with arriving in the field but with the beginning to journeying” (Van Oorschot, 2021, p. 68). The way in which I organize my methods and the theoretical companions I choose, after all, allow for particular modes of analysis and not others. We have started in a different *middle* perhaps, but in the next section I would like to transition to *arriving*. It is worth reiterating that what follows is not a retelling of my earlier fieldwork. In this article, I pose different questions to my materials and order them in new ways. By putting it on stage next to different authors, in new juxtapositions, I bring myself into a position where we can begin to think through the interdependencies between art-science *in the literature* and art-science *in practice*.

Art-science-in-the-making

In my RASL study, I wanted to be at a place where ‘art-science’ was still in flux, where new associations were forged to hold the collective together. Latour, in his book *Science in Action*, proposes to use science-in-the-making as an opening wedge to understanding science. Following his lead, I avoided the temptation to opt for “the more grandiose entrance of ready made [art-]science” and instead found my way to the art-science construction site (Latour, 1987, p. 4). For nosy researchers construction sites have a lot to offer. You see the skills and creativity of the practitioners and it gives an impression of what it means for an object, in this case *art-science*, to emerge. For me, spending time at construction sites also packs some political potency. It gives strength to the conviction that “things *could be different* [...] a feeling never so deep when faced with the final product, no matter how beautiful or impressive it may be” (Latour, 2005, p. 89).

Before arriving at the art-science construction site, I read an awful lot of academic articles about art-science, higher education, and transdisciplinarity: my colleagues and I scanned through 458 articles, to be precise (Van Baalen, De Groot and Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2021). In this reading frenzy, I noticed that many case studies only began to talk about art-science when an artist and a scientist appeared on stage. Let there be no mistake, there are many interesting tales to tell about such encounters, but they also leave a lot of things untold. Perhaps the disproportionate attention to the pursuits and ideas of artists and scientists, in art-science writing, can be explained by what William James

(1909, p. 109)⁴ called a “vicious abstractionism”. It is a tendency that unfolds by way of “singling out some salient or important feature” from an array of practicalities (Ibid., p. 58). That particularity is then made to be the hallmark of *x* and the more it is reinforced, in the bibliographies of other texts for example, the more *x* becomes “nothing but” that aspect. This is where abstraction – an invaluable instrument in our explorative journeys – becomes abstractionism; it is turned into a process of purification. Abstractions, mangled in the vicious cycle of abstractionism, can only *recognize*, but they fail in making us think (Stengers, 2005).

The ‘nothing but’ approach may be neat and tidy but is not productive. It leaves us with an enormous container filled with “the remainder of things” (as Irene van Oorschot calls it with the help of Whitehead, 1953, p. 47). At the art-science construction site, I stumbled upon assessment matrices, ‘paper trails’ prepared for audits soon to come, PowerPoint presentations for open days, and Excel-based representations of art-science curricula. Instead of searching, amid this rich paraphernalia, for *true* manifestations of art-science, I committed myself to stay close to the mundane and the material. In the next section, I would like to take a closer look at the paper trails carefully construed by the workgroup and see what role they play in holding the new art-science collective together.

Making art-science, making auditability

Audits, paper trails, and art-science. If that sounds like an offbeat recital, then that is the point. Why bother doing fieldwork at all if you already know what you will find? Fieldwork is about embarking on a journey with an openness to being surprised, “giving to the situation the power to make us think” (Stengers, 2005, p. 185). Therefore, when the members of the workgroup started talking about making their work “audit proof”, I continued taking field notes. Although my research never took me to any audits, their looming presence⁵ manifested itself in how points on the agenda were ordered and for which degree programs the assessment matrices and learning goals had to be updated.

The workgroup’s notion of ‘audit proof’ implies that not everything is readily available to be audited. That is not the case because a premature audit may lead to a negative assessment. It is because the object in question cannot yet present itself as an appropriate *auditee*. The art-science curriculum, without the ‘audit proof practices’, cannot be adequately ‘seen’ by the audit. In the literature, this is discussed as ‘making things auditable’, that is “structured to conform to the need to be monitored *ex-post*”

⁴ For this line of thought I am indebted to Irene van Oorschot’s writing (2021, e.g., pp. 10–11 and pp. 45–46).

⁵ The audit, here, is always “generalized *and* specific”, as Lucy Suchman puts it (2000, p. 316): it takes the shape of an urgent email to one of the members of the workgroup, a phone call from the Dean, or a brief remark during a coffee break from a member of the Examination Board.

(Power, 1994, p. 8). Michael Power, in his book with the resolute title *The Audit Explosion*, persuasively dissects the audit's promises of 'more accountability, efficiency, and quality'. Shore and Wright (1999, p. 570), building on Power's work, note that although "the audit explosion has encouraged cynicism and staged performance, it is very hard for individuals or institutions to escape its influence".

Interestingly, the members of the workgroup do not try to remain unaffected by the 'pervasive logic of the audit', not because of the futility of such an attempt, but because they use the technologies of the audit to stabilize their new art-science intersection. The workgroup's concern lies with creating an art-science curriculum and they take that job seriously. At the construction site, their art-science assembly is still a fragile and precarious artifact, *it can still fail*. The ability to anchor it to something 'pervasive' is welcomed, the more ties the new assembly has the stabler it becomes. Therefore, when 'audit proof questions' arise during their team meetings, the members of the workgroup seize the opportunity. They are not dupes, still believing in the promises of the audit, solemnly waiting for someone to enlighten them. They prepare Excel sheets and other paper trails because it benefits their intervention. The concerns of the workgroup, in their practical engagement with audits, are simply not the same as the concerns raised in the 'audit culture' literature⁶.

Shore and Wright (2000, p. 76) create an analogy between the rationality of the audit and that of the panopticon: "it orders the whole system while ranking everyone within it. Every individual is made acutely aware that their conduct and performance is under constant scrutiny". With their invigorating writing style, Shore and Wright hold to account the audit itself. Their texts leave you with a sense of urgency. Many of their articles accompany me in my writing, but I try to devise a different path when it comes to talking about the 'totalizing' nature of the audit logic (Shore and Wright, 1999, p. 569). This different path, then, does not render the other one obsolete. I follow Donna J. Haraway's (2020, para 6) example of "working by addition rather than subtraction so that various work doesn't substitute for other work". Divergent paths carry different kinds of traffic and help us move to different destinations (as Mol, 2002, p. 109 tells us with the help of Latour, 1988, p. 179).

I devise a different path because, first, art-science in practice has taught me that 'the logic of the audit' as it appears in the literature is not always the logic of *doing the audit*. In my fieldwork, I did not encounter vacant receptacles waiting to be filled by logics. On the contrary, I saw creative, sometimes subversive ways of crafting 'paper trails' in the service of helping into being an art-science intersection. Precisely the idea that auditability is not an innate feature of objects, but must be made, is something the members of the workgroup understood perfectly well, and they used it to their advantage. The second reason why I part ways with more unitary accounts of audits is because, in practice, 'the logic of the audit' is not omnipresent. Instead, it is distributed

⁶ For an excellent introduction to the notion of audit cultures, see Marilyn Strathern's (2000) text *New Accountabilities*.

(in Mol's sense of the word, 2002, pp. 87–117). During any given workgroup meeting, this was already done in a thoroughly mundane manner. The audit appeared, for example, as the second point on the agenda. As such, it had its own little locale in which it could 'reign': fifteen minutes for the audit, then we move on to the open day. An issue that, in the literature, may be raised into a full-blown dispute is then effectively pacified by its distribution in practice. After all, raising a conflict or a dispute is oftentimes not conducive to your everyday workgroup meeting.

Of course, this should not be taken as a call to model ourselves after the "opportunistic cynics who know how to make all the right moves", who we encounter in Isabelle Stengers' (2018, p. 50) manifesto for Slow Science. Quite the contrary. In my exploration of the ties put in place to stabilize a new art-science intersection, I aim to – in the same movement – destabilize monolithic notions of *the audit*. It is the flatness of my field that opens up a territory where action is possible⁷, or so I hope. As Latour (2005, p. 250) put it rather bluntly, "if you have to fight against a force that is invisible, untraceable, ubiquitous, and total, you will be powerless and roundly defeated". Moreover, exposing the various connections of art-science, in this particular corner of the world, is not meant as a naturalization of this mode of connectedness. It is an attempt to create the conditions in which we can raise the question: What would it mean for art-science to be well connected?

Between desk and field

Today, you would be hard-pressed to find researchers who still uphold the idea of 'a field' as a strictly delineated quasi-geographical location *out there*. The field is, to an important extent, relationally and discursively crafted in research proposals, in discussions with colleagues and PhD supervisors, and in conversation with other texts. In this more recent understanding, the field never exists independently from the researcher, but neither is it the sole creation of the researcher. A field may fail if it is not persuasively performed in the hinterland of, for example, funding agencies, informants, journals, and critical peers. Those parties may push and pull in different directions. It is up to the researcher to weave together the concerns and demands that arise in the oscillation between "the double location" of 'field' and desk (Strathern, 1999, p. 1).

Once again staring at my word processor (which seems to be an important part of *writing*), I would hold that the oscillating movement between field and desk is a productive one. It keeps in focus the question: Are the abstractions I mobilize and produce well-founded? That is to say, do they not "abstract from everything that is important in

⁷ I write this with the words of Marilyn Strathern and Andrea Fraser in my mind. In 1997, Strathern (p. 319) wrote: "[...] we are witnessing an effect that we (practitioners in higher education) have helped produce. Auditors are not aliens: they are a version of ourselves." Fraser (2005, para 25), in a similar vein but not explicitly talking about audits, writes that every "time we speak of the "institution" as other than "us," we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions".

experience”, to speak with Alfred North Whitehead (1953, p. 59)⁸. At the desk, something can feel compelling and cogent, but it may lose all its relevance and persuasiveness when tested against the concerns and the grip of the earthly encounter. The same may be true when the direction is reversed. The alternating trips between field and desk are characterized by experimentation and uncertainty. Our carrier bag (to borrow Ursula Le Guin’s concept) is packed with theories, commitments, concerns, deadlines, writing materials, and perhaps a phone charger. But it never contains a map with a big red cross on it, hence the uncertainty. It is experimental because it is an opportunity to *give the possible a chance*. There lies the critical potential of fieldwork. Fieldwork, as a *sensible* event, requires “allowing oneself to be touched, and allowing what touches you the power to modify the way you relate to your own reasons” (Stengers, 2019, p. 16).

During my fieldwork, ‘the audit’ was a recurring concern in how art-science *was done*. Engaging with audit technologies was an important building block, if you will, for the new art-science intersection. Allowing myself to be in/affected by the concerns of my informants (Zuiderant-Jerak, 2015), I did not attempt to ‘explain away’ or simply justify their concerns. Instead, responding to their concerns meant understanding ‘how they make things matter’ and how my (theoretical) commitments would perhaps advise me against taking them into account. It was clear that, in my fieldwork, the audit was approached and seized as an opportunity to *do something new*, to stabilize and legitimize an otherwise fragile undertaking. The constitutive capacity of the audit was seen and used. But the audit *here* was constitutive not in the coercive sense, as outlined in much critical literature, but in a productive sense: it helped to bring into being an art-science initiative driven by ideas of response-ability, more-than-disciplinary co-creation and collaboration, and premised on the equality of knowledges (see Van den Akker *et al.*, 2021). Juxtaposing this practice, then, against a body of literature that underlined the disciplining force of audits, helped me to tell a different story.

It helped me to tell a story where the work that is oftentimes considered superfluous to the *real work* – the mundane proceedings of the “paper shufflers” – comes to the fore as an essential ingredient in hyphenating art to science. It is the unreal work that deserves our critical curiosity because, still, it is “the source of an essential power, that constantly escapes attention since its materiality is ignored” (Latour, 1986, p. 26). Art-science proved to move and stumble quite differently in a “rich, densely structured landscape of identities and working relations” than it does in academic writing (Suchman, 2002, p. 141). Of course, it is not the point to achieve congruence between the two. That is equally impossible as it is fruitless for both domains. But I have grown increasingly wary of the texts and abstractions we use to “hop, skip, and jump over the surface of life” (James, 1909, p. 109). Theory spinning in thin air is not worth upholding, nor do we wish to wade through the “thickness of particulars as accident rained them down upon our heads” (*Ibid.*, p. 109). The challenge is to experiment, feel, and negotiate to

⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, in his work *Science and the Modern World*, has termed this ‘The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness’.

find where the rubber meets the road, where the generative friction between the two can foster our ability to tell new stories (Tsing, 2005, p. 4).

In vectorizing audits, art-science, and notes from the field, I hope to have upset all of them. May audits lose their totalizing powers (on our imaginations as well as on our daily lives, depending on your take on the matter). Let us find the places where the light gets in – the cracks and the fractures in ‘the bloody system’ – and use them as a lure for imagining and working towards “still possible recuperating pasts, presents, and futures” (Haraway, 2016, p. 50). May art-science be more impure. If it must have a single or salient feature, let it be its refusal to be a single object. Faced with an art-science, devoid of a center and consisting of a thick foliage of theoretical and material entanglements, we are forced to situate ourselves and account for our commitments and collaborations. Finally, let ‘the field’ not be the pristine source of our theories or the landscape which our concepts are meant to order. Let us be ‘touched by’ (Stengers, 2019) the field and let our field notes help us in “telling our stories in another way, in a way that situates us otherwise – not as defined by the past, but as able, perhaps, to inherit from it in another way” (Stengers, 2011, p. 14).

Between field and field

In the edited volume you are currently browsing through, this text is asked to situate itself in relation to a field where philosophy clings to anthropology as an adjective: philosophical anthropology. It is an address to which I will try to respond. But before getting there, I like to notice that the *situating* is to a substantial extent done outside the realm of my influence. My article simply appears, whether it justifies itself or not, alongside authors ‘speaking from and to’ philosophical anthropology. Moreover, the article sits in an edited volume where the imagined readership is thought to be affiliated with, one way or another, the field of philosophical anthropology. This brief return to the material and practical, before attempting a more theoretically informed response, is reassuring. Situating a text is never a one-person job, nor is it an entirely human endeavor. It is hopefully clear by now that I prefer to distribute the action a bit more widely, across a more heterogeneous collection of actors. The situatedness of this text is thus also partially accounted for by its sheer proximity to other PA texts, by readers coming to this book with a rich library of previous writing and reading in the field, and, of course, by a generous editor attempting to weave together the texts in a productive alliance. The question, then, that I wish to take up is: What can the field philosopher bring back to the field of study?

Because of the intimate development of ethnography, anthropology, and the colonial project, I should make clear that when I speak of a field philosopher “bringing something back”, I wish these words to be taken up not with an “extractivist mindset”, but rather with an ethos of “deep reciprocity” (as Leanne Simpson teaches us in an interview with Naomi Klein, 2013). The field philosopher does not serve the “engines of assimilation” where ideas and findings are fed into the anonymous advancement

of disciplinary knowledge (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 50)⁹. Rather, they learn, as I hoped to have shown earlier, to engage with how matters come to matter in *this* field. The first thing, then, the field philosopher can bring to their field of study is an awareness of, what Isabelle Stengers (2018b) has called, the “testator’s demands” (pp. 406–407). The figure of the testator is a reference to the ‘professional critics’ who assessed the gold the alchemist claimed to be able to produce. The testator does not speak but demands: “Wherever I go, whatever I address, I *must* be able to ask the same questions” (Ibid., 2018b, p. 411). These questions police who can appear as a knowing subject and what can be legitimately known.

Stengers’ testator barges through any situation untroubled by what it destroys or ignores. Precisely the pompousness of the figure adds to the effectiveness of the argument Stengers is advancing. But the pomposity is less helpful in recognizing how we may carry the testator’s demands with us on our travails. When Marilyn Strathern, in 1997, put the cultural apparatus of audit technologies on the agenda (in conversation with many others), she also reminded us that auditors are not aliens, “they are a version of ourselves” (p. 319). In accordance with her idea, I would suggest that we must resist the inclination to merely understand ‘the testator’ as an entity outside ourselves. The testator is not an alien, we may carry its voice and its demands with us when carrying out our knowledge practices. Fieldwork, I propose, is helpful in that it puts us in a “contact zone” (understood in Haraway’s sense, 2008, p. 216–219) where we can recognize that voice for what it is: the warden of the prevailing disciplinary or paradigmatic order.

Embarking on fieldwork with an openness to be touched by the concerns and passions of your informants changes you. Returning to your field of study, transformed by the encounter¹⁰, brings you in a position to notice where the disciplinary lines are drawn and who or what is allowed to do the drawing. The extra-disciplinary travels of the field philosopher, thus, cultivate an astute disciplinary awareness. An awareness that is helpful in identifying where our disciplinary ways of knowing may jam, oppress, or ‘fail to see’. Staying with these disciplinary troubles, then, does not mean resignation or, on the other hand, immediate restoration, but rather a commitment to partial ameliorating. That is, I would argue, one of the gifts the field philosopher may proffer to their field of study. The intention of giving is, however, not enough for the actualization of a gift. Therefore, it remains a vulnerable gesture, awaiting a response...

9 This is a normative statement by me, rather than an empirical claim.

10 Of course, in practice, the return is not as rigid and clear-cut as these lines make it out to be. A good example of what I have in mind can be found in Else Vogel’s article (2021, p. 63) based on her research on eating and health in the Netherlands. She recounts an experience where she, in the spirit of innovating academia, brought one of her informants to the “academic collegial space where we analyze and write”. The informant’s input (a coach whose motto was “count pleasure, not calories”) was met with a mix of disinterestedness and hostility: “Who was this coach to ‘tell them’ to ‘enjoy’ their food?” Vogel writes that the situation turned “quite awkward indeed!” The challenge, then, is to *stay with this awkwardness* (to put it in Harawayian terms).

In medias res, once more

We are back where we started: once again, firmly in the middle of things. This article can be read as a progression through various, but related encounters: between field and fieldworker; between fieldworker and field of study, and, of course, the encounter between the arts and sciences. Through encounters we learn what counts; what *is of value* or *at stake* in various – always partial – assemblages across difference. My attention for the hyphen in art-science attuned me to how subjects are constituted by the modalities in which they relate to each other. The figure of the testator seeks to replace *related to* by *determined by*: a mode of relationality characterized by imposition and carelessness. In this article, I hoped to have opened up a space in which we can explore the question: What does it mean to be well-connected? Inspired by the ‘emergent field of art-science’, I encourage a search for *better dependence* and a willingness to “accept the risk of actual encounters” (Stengers, 2018b, p. 409) in which ‘all the subjects are changed in surprising ways’ (to paraphrase Haraway, 2008, p. 219).

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