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# RESEARCHING FROM THE OTHER SIDE

In this essay I am juxtaposing two statements of the conference. Both statements concern the expertise of the designer. These statements are then juxtaposed to my own insights gained in an applied design research project. The conflict experienced by a practicing designer during research becomes evident.

Rheinberger reflects on research. In his lecture he states that designers who research become researchers.<sup>1</sup> They are therefore no longer designers. Designers who carry out research turn into something else, namely researchers. This constitutes a dilemma. If the designers continue to apply their gained expertise in their familiar domain, i.e. design, they will not be able to gain scientific insight. If they use their expertise in the domain of research, they become beginners. They lose their specific knowledge and skills. They forego routine and instinct. In case of doubt they will also not gain insight this way. How should they behave therefore?

As a practicing designers am initially convinced that the expertise I have gained and applied in my work can also lead to insight. I am a visual designer and work with visual artifacts. I look at these from a specific perspective, that of the maker. I know how a visual artifact is created and therefore ask myself questions that differ from those of someone who does not

have this background. In my research, I examine drawings by creating drawings myself or ask test subjects to create drawings. I answer visual questions in a visual way and I insist that I have knowledge of drawings that a person who does not have a practical background does not have. I am a designer who researches. Yet how can that be without facing the above-stated dilemma? If I am a researcher. I lose my expertise and my domain, yet if I remain a designer I cannot research.

Noë discusses the work of the designer. To him, design has a specific mission that cannot be fulfilled by research.<sup>2</sup> It is about changing the nature of things. The expertise of designers includes not accepting the status quo as such. Designers question, turn things around and try the other side. This way, designers reach insights or the solution to a problem in their familiar domain. Noë claims that the designer acts as a liberator. But does that mean that designers can also liberate research? How can that work?

1 "YOU ARE TRANSFORMING DESIGN INTO, WHAT I WOULD CALL, AN EPISTEMIC THING. SO YOU ARE NO LONGER DOING DESIGN – YOU ARE RESEARCHING INTO DESIGN." RHEINBERGER, HANS-JÖRG: "THE PROBLEM OF DESIGN IN RESEARCH". ZÜRICH, 2014. LECTURE AT THE CONFERENCE "INTRINSIC LOGIC OF DESIGN". [HTTP://BLOG.ZHDK.CH/EIGENLOGIK/SYMPOSIUM/TALKS/](http://blog.zhdk.ch/eigenlogik/symposium/talks/) (RETRIEVED APRIL 20, 2015). "EPISTEMIC THING" REFERS TO ITEMS FROM WHICH INSIGHT CAN BE GAINED UNDER SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES.

2 "DESIGN HAS THAT MISSION OF RE-ORGANIZING, OF DOING THINGS A BIT DIFFERENTLY. [...] SCIENCE CAN'T FREE US!" NOË, ALVA: "FREEDOM, AUTHORSHIP, BEING-IN-THE-WORLD". ZÜRICH, 2014. LECTURE AT THE CONFERENCE "INTRINSIC LOGIC OF DESIGN" [HTTP://BLOG.ZHDK.CH/EIGENLOGIK/SYMPOSIUM/TALKS/](http://blog.zhdk.ch/eigenlogik/symposium/talks/) (RETRIEVED APRIL 20, 2015).

FIG. 55  
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Let us return to my case, i.e. that of a practicing designer who researches drawings. In my research I declare the pencil and my eye to be instruments of insight. This alters the expertise. I declare my studio to be a laboratory. This alters the domain. For me, this renaming is an attempt to avoid the above dilemma. This is because if designers remain designers in part they keep their expertise and domain. They are familiar with the instrument and the laboratory. They will have to adopt unfamiliar things from research but can rely on familiar things from their practical expertise. May it even be possible to free research this way? Or do designers simply act unscientific this way, i.e. outside the realm of research and are therefore exclusively designers? In the end, the role of the liberator may be the only chance of the designer to escape the dilemma. If designers liberate, they will be able to show that the expertise gained as designers constitutes a new aspect and a new approach to research. This approach will be on equal footing with already established approaches. It would be worth a try!

FIG. 55 — INSTRUMENT, WHICH ALIENATES DESIGNERS FROM THEIR EXPERTISE



FIG. 54 — DOMAIN: STUDIO OF THE DESIGNER AS A LABORATORY



FIG. 57 — EXPERIMENT SET UP FOR FOUR TEST SUBJECTS



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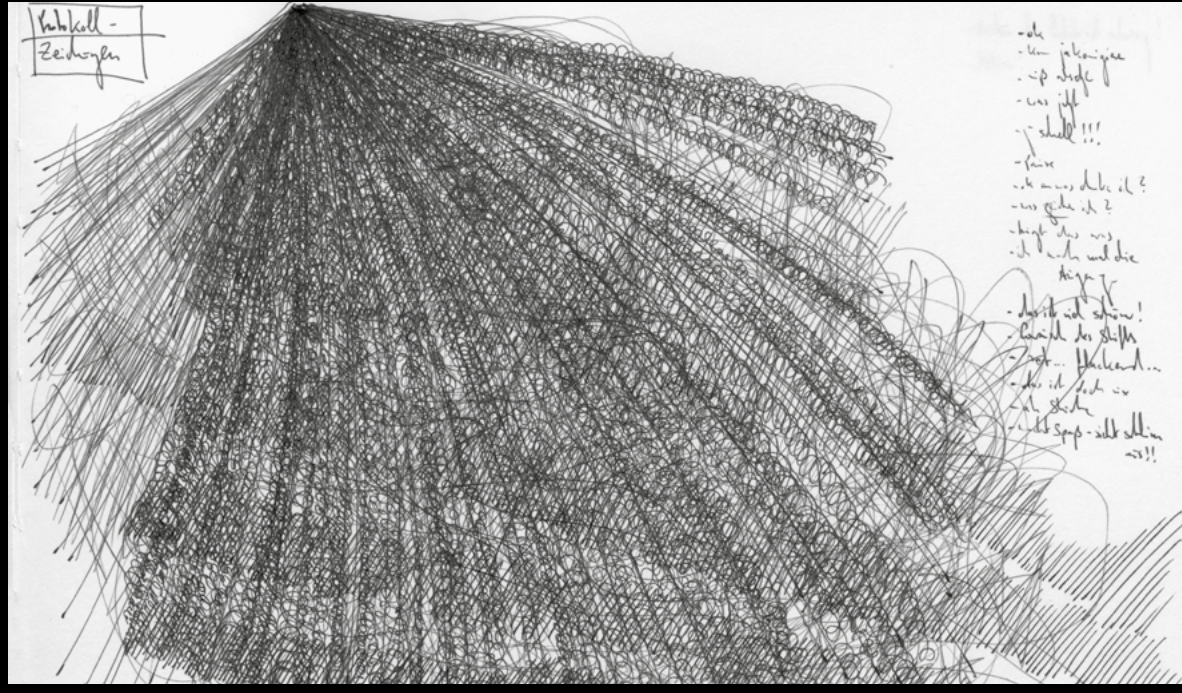
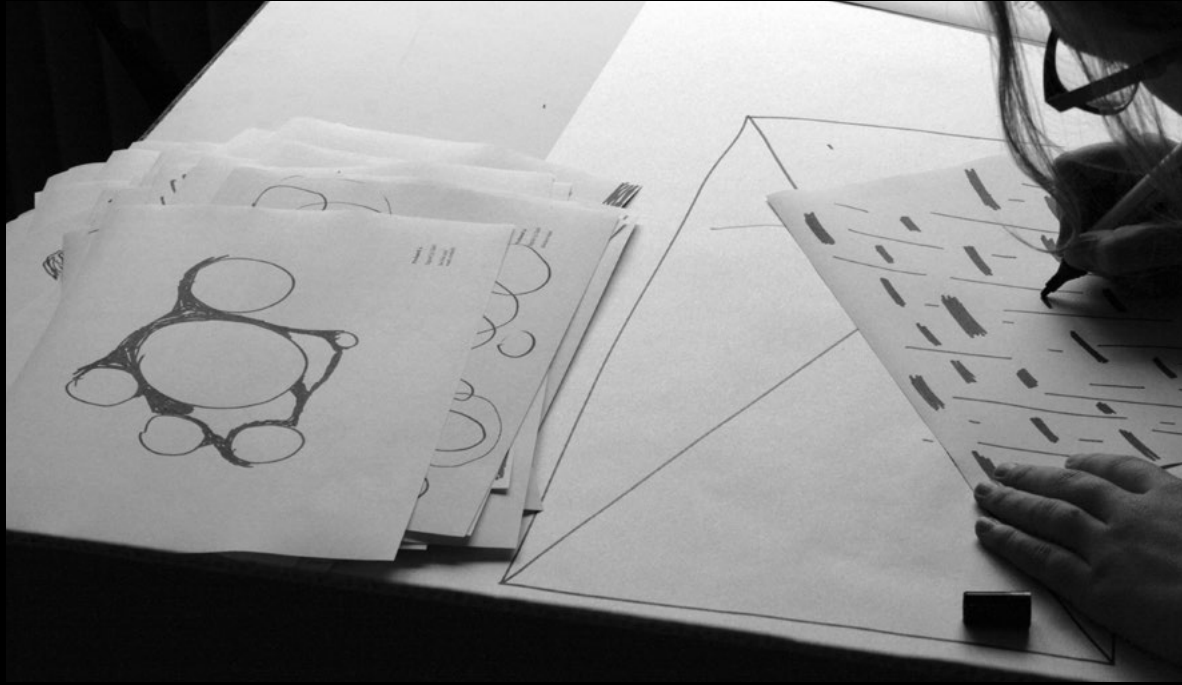


FIG. 56 — ENTRY FROM THE RESEARCH DIARY AS A LABORATORY SNAP-SHOT



GERHARD M. BUURMAN IN  
CONVERSATION WITH ALBENA YANEVA

E.4

# MAPPING CONTROVERSIES

GMB    Gerhard M. Buurman  
AY     Albena Yaneva

GMB    The making of "The intrinsic logic of design" was very challenging for the inquiring eye. It was a playful way to understand the openness and diversity or the charming indiscipline of our own creative practice. Where did you encounter the usefulness of ANT in your practice?

AY     I have used extensively Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) in my research to address questions of invention and creativity in different fields: in contemporary art, industrial design, traditional crafts and architecture. The method comes from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). By translating literally the Greek word "epistemology", science studies suggested that the knowledge about a central and insolvable problem could be gained by knowing the local and empirically traceable ones, following and accounting the networks of activities. The ANT presumes that there is a basic uncertainty regarding the very nature of action and objects, to the extent that in order to produce an "explanation of ..." the researcher cannot rely on mobilizing

pre-established definitions. Its methodology requires, instead, the following of the actors in their routine practices and the watchful accounting of their actions and transactions in complex spatial settings, the materialization of the successive operations they perform on a daily basis and the foreseen and unforeseen consequential effects they trigger. In such a thorough ethnographical survey of practitioners at work the researcher can gain access to the actors' own definitions of the social, of the way they are given identity as a group, of the variety of agents (both human and nonhuman) that partake in their actions.

Over the past twenty years, STS have closely followed scientists, engineers, physicians, managers in and out of their workplaces. ANT served as a method of enquiry to tackle scientific and medical practices, technological innovation, and was later applied to engineering design and the arts. Yet, little attention was paid to designers, architects and urban planners, and their activities in the design studio, in the model shop, at public presentations, and on the construction site. In a series