"devices of writing - how to catch them?"  franck leibovici

one simple thing to avoid weak collaborations: to not consider that either art will be the illustration of scientific results (art as information design), or science will just be here to provide « hard » data. there is no such thing as « the important thing », forcing art or science to come after or before the main event. artists and scholars don’t use the same medium and formats. don’t evaluate artists’ works from a pdf or a text, don’t expect that artists can talk as an academic. both groups will use a different vocabulary, and a different format. if it’s highly useful they share a bibliography, it does not happen that often.

let’s rather put the stress on shared practices between arts and social sciences, or on complementary practices. every practice is sequential, temporal, made of tricks and of narratives, involves different people. so there is plenty of room to invent things or patterns as long as practices are not considered as a set of fixed rules, but as a space and a temporality of invention. for that, it implies that artefacts in art should not be considered as fixed artefacts but as a process including collectives, practices, mediations.

one thing, for instance, some artists and some scholars have in common: a field, and the need to produce some knowledge from it. the process to produce knowledge requires a certain device, which could be called « technology of writing », where writing is not made to express ideas, but is a device, a set up, made to produce data. the data are the direct consequences of the set up device, of the « technology of writing ». but even before that, choosing the right field (the richest, the most adequate) is a skill belonging to all « professional visions » (agriculturors will know how to recognize a fertile field, etc.). so, once again, that’s the set up which will make the best of the field.

however, there might be a difference between the art field and other professional fields, as art is an « essentially contested » notion (nobody agrees on what art is); nothing of a stabilized knowledge does exist among members – neither should it exist, then, among scientists coming to study art...

about the potentially symmetrical principle: if a social scientist asks « what kind of benefits a social study of art could bring to artists? », which means « will artists be changed by a knowledge brought on themselves by social sciences? » like if they would become more conscious – or, another way to put it, « should an investigation be useful to the people who are studied? », then the same question should be returned to the scholar: does the study of artworks have change her or his scientific practices, or did the study of an artwork have the same effect than studying any other object?

one example i’ll develop comes from my experience as a (ex-)member of the board of the « school of political arts », set up and run by bruno latour at sciences-po, paris, where young social scientists, artists, architects, professionals were to work together on public issues, commissioned not by the university, but by associations from the civil society (outside...). the result was never a simple report of an investigation, nor a traditional artwork. it was a non generic dispositif, fragile but rich.

an artwork is not a nice artefact, or a useful artefact as creative designers can produce many. an artwork is a set of practices, involving collectives and embedded in a form of life, which means political, ethical stances, and is also defined by the consequences it will produce. an artwork is therefore not so easily transportable from one context to another context because its correlated form of life has also to be transported. without it, the artwork is lost, only the object remains. there’s a price to pay then: the political and ethical issues which are contained in the artwork or in the practice go with the artefact.

an artwork can work as a device to analyze or to create a situation. as long as it is exhibited in an art center or a museum, it is a prototype. it becomes something else, something useful, for instance for social sciences, as soon as it becomes a public prototype. in order to reach this scale, the artwork has to involve more actors, more institutions, it has to be embedded in more
programs. only then, it can become a pattern or a model, and make a change. usually, artworks
never get to that point because the time unit of an art project is exhibition-based: when the
show is over, the artworks get to the storage rooms. there’s nobody anymore available to take
care of them – as interesting they could have been. as academic papers can circulate and be
available to anybody who would be interested by it, new structures in order to allow artworks to
circulate in different ways are then needed.