

A promotion in the arts: an art in itself

Introduction

A promotion, a doctorate, a PhD in the arts is the crown on a long and often painstaking process of research by trial and error in a surrounding which is not by definition always fertile nor responsive to this activity.

First some definitions: for regularities sake, although I know that a promotion, a doctorate or a PhD is not in all circumstances the same, in this lecture I use the word promotion for the process and the ceremony leading to the title Dr. (translated in English: Ph.D). The same for the term 'arts'. In my university the Faculty of Arts is the conglomerate of studies in languages and cultures of certain regions, history, art history, linguistics, in Dutch: Faculteit der Letteren (literally: of Literature, Literacy). The Faculty where promotions in the arts will take place in a not too distant future we have named Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts (Faculteit der Kunsten). For regularities sake in this lecture I will speak about arts or the arts as the conglomerate of music, dance, theatre, visual & fine arts and design.

Before discussing the promotion and the process to it we have to start with reflections on two main subjects:

what is research in the arts

what is the relation between arts and science

because, before one can bring a promotion in the arts to general acceptance within a university-setting, one has to arrive at an agreement about differences and similarities between arts and science, about the concept that research in the arts is at all possible and that this research has differences and similarities with scientific research.

An exchange of arguments or a debate with spokesmen declaring that arts and sciences are not the same, very different and two different worlds, that research in the arts has nothing to do with scientific research and is just the process of making and performing, such discussions do not end up in any sensitive solution.

The arts world never pretends that all arts is research, the world of science should try to admit that not all science is research.

Arts and Science

In the words of visual artist Paul Dikker both are based in *ars et ingenium*, skills and inspiration, ratio and intuition. Both the scientist and the artist are faced with problems for which they have to find new and original solutions through an open and non-conformistic attitude. The creative processes in the arts and in sciences run (more or less) in the same way. There is a given situation, which is confronted with a problem; by trial and error, and with certain methods, suddenly there is a solution or working procedure

and in the end it is checked if the result is valid, verifiable and satisfactory; if not there must be a second round. Both artist and scientist have drive, passion and dedication, in combination with the consciousness that arts and science embody the higher, the absolute, the endless and the perfect.

There is another aspect in common between the artist and the scientist. In the words of Professor Robbert Dijkgraaf, once student at the Amsterdam Rietveld Fine Arts Academy and now Professor of mathematical physics at Amsterdam University: loneliness. Both shall walk on the empty road, on their way to novelty and innovation. One could think that natural science means: security, but in fact the 'front of science' is – like the battlefield of the arts - a war zone: all the time one hears the big bangs of new discoveries. And even more eloquent is this quote from Antonio Machado's *Proverbios y cantares*: Wanderer, your foot-marks make the road, nothing else; there is no road, the walking gives birth to the road.... Traveler, there is no road. It disappears and what remains is a wake in the sea.

A widespread discussion subject when comparing arts and science is the possibility of testing, verification and repetition.

Where in science verification is a core activity, in the arts we have quality judgment, which is very well possible, despite subjective elements. Whilst in the performing arts the availability of the right skills is an important criterium, in the creative arts the combination of skills, awareness of historical context, time, space, rhythm, dynamics, colour, a spirit of innovation, the use of the right means and tools, ambition, size, scope: all such elements are the ingredients which play key-roles in a quality assessment process. Repetition, which is hardly possible in the arts, is often seen as the holy shrine of science; but happily many scientists tell us nowadays that they quite frequently fail when performing the same tests with the same ingredients in the hope to arrive at complete identical results.

The challenging issue is how the arts, science and let us nowadays add: technology – e.g. the unclear borderlines between 'multi-media-art' and applications of digital technology, such as digital games – influence each other.

In the words of Professor Robert Zwijnenberg, professor in art history in relation with natural science and technique at Maastricht University: in the Italian Renaissance already the arts was strongly connected with anatomy. Natural representations of the body on paintings was unthinkable without the results of new anatomic discoveries. But in anatomic pictures we see the artistic conventions of the time. They never are pure representations of anatomic knowledge, but show also theological and philosophical opinions about who and what we are as human beings. Science, technology, the arts, religion, philosophy have always been connected in their development in history.

The development of the linear perspective in Italian painting of the 15th century has directly influenced the development of sketching and designing of machines and equipment in technical treatises. Also now we need intensified research into the nature of cooperation between artists and scientists, the material and the role of techniques in

scientific representation. Science, arts and technology should in this process be seen as cultural phenomena which in their coherence produce knowledge and give meaning to our world and our position as human beings in this world. An interesting and somewhat peculiar position can be seen in the middle of the 20th century. In that period there was a cultural call for the merging of art and technology. Many saw a surplus of technical skills contrasting with a diminution of art in materialized and even more materializing Western society. Cross-fertilization between these disciplines would theoretically provide a more enriching social balance.

In the US, a non-profit organization called Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) was founded in 1966 describing its *raison d'être* as: 'The collaboration of artist and engineer... emerges as a revolutionary contemporary process. Artists and engineers are becoming aware of their crucial role in changing the human environment and the relevant forces shaping our society. Engineers are aware that the artists' insight can influence their direction and give human scale to their work, and the artists recognizes richness, variety and human necessity as qualities of the new technology'. EAT envisioned 'the possibility of a work, which is not the preconception of either the engineer, the artist or industry, but rather the result of the exploration of the human interaction between the three areas'. In December 1966 over 300 artists' critics and engineers participated in an EAT conference in New York City.

Unfortunately the organization ceased to be after a decade. To foster a harmonious collaboration between the two camps proved to be too difficult.

Nowadays we notify a new impetus in this matter.

Art, science and technique have made it their tasks to change the borderlines of our culture. The arts are affecting the image and picture of our culture and open our eyes for new ones, science puts them in doubt and technique does realize them.

The latin 'ars' meant art, skill and science. Both artist and scientist are researchers, who use the materials provided to them by the world in their own creative way.

Works of art can connect very harmoniously with research and are able to deepen it in a surprising way. Johan van Benthem, professor at Amsterdam and Stanford University says: sometimes it is a relation between ideas, patterns and beauty in e.g. mathematics, music and graphic design. It is remarkable how visual artists, purely on the base of their phantasy, indicate new possibilities for new perspectives on structuring the space. Many scientific outcomes can very well be seen as arts forms: some mathematical arguments or proofs, the construction of star-watching-devices, the amazing and elegant abstract choreography of our cells, where proteins dance around to control and repair our DNA. And what to think of neuro-imaging of the brains of artists at work where we can see what actually happens. We might hope that the mystery doesn't disappear and that we will be able to enjoy creativity and beauty even deeper if we understand the underlying mechanisms better.

It is hardly useful nor appropriate to start an argument if one of the systems (arts or science) outdoes the other. Nevertheless I like to draw attention for the way Leonardo da Vinci expresses himself about in particular the perception by the senses, in relation to arts and science.

Leonardo asks us to realize that how we perceive through, by, with the eye can hardly be expressed in words in a sufficient way. One can show in a draft, a picture, a painting much more than words can describe. “Writer: your pencil is empty before you have completely written what the painter expresses in his ‘science’ ”. Is it not the same, I dare to say with the ear? Is any ‘scientific’ article nor press review, how brilliantly written as they might be, ever able to express what we hear instantaneously during a performance? This is not a plea against the spoken and the written word, on the contrary; but we need a lot of time and space to do it in full respect. Leonardo’s remark is a laudatio on our senses, which, - the eye and the ear in particular - have immense capacities and varieties to communicate tremendous amounts of information, especially in the area of the unspeakable.

A painting is immediately accessible as a whole, whilst we have only indirectly and gradually access to a text before we can take the whole content.

An whole other subject is: arts about science. Theatre directors and playwrights who incorporate in their work astronomy and the universe, and produce theatre about the primeval soup, quarks and the beginnings of mankind. There is ecological art and biological art, where the artist not only works scientific knowledge into his art, but also applies scientific techniques.

There are even theories that the 21th century artist not only needs artistic skills but must also have insight in the laws or natural science. The artist must both see and see into it. As an example: it was Marc Quinn who made genetical portraits: a cloud full of drops, with in each drop a colony of bacteria’s, grown from a cell with the DNA of the person on the portrait. Herewith it is not only the portrait of that person but also from his ancestors, and in fact the beginning of life in the universe. In a way this genetical portrait makes the invisible visible.

To summarize the above we may conclude that both in the arts and in science there are three main conditions at stake: creativity, inventivity and inquisitiveness. Which doesn’t mean that art and science are the same, a thought which adversaries or opponents of our wish to bring both fields/areas in the same biotope and on the same level – with inspiration for and exchange between both of them –try to reproach us. Don’t blame us, so says artist and philosopher Pieter Hoexum, for something we do not think nor want. We do not strive for cultural unity. Not every important artist is supposed to include great moral and scientific visions in his work, which leads to unnecessary and not wanted for humdrum and hullabaloo-talking with the picture or the image. The artist, the physicist, they are different, but they both root in contexts, work on the basis of methods, use certain processes, are aware of past, present and future and relate to the enormous corpus of work by their predecessors.

Research

What is research in the arts as we have determined in the consortium Orpheus Institute Gent, Conservatoires in Amsterdam and The Hague and Leiden University. We based ourselves on principles of general understanding.

The artistic process and product are vital elements of the research; the research findings consist of a number of artistic products and/or presentations. Research contributes to the augmentation of knowledge (so: to new knowledge) and understanding of the overall area of study, and not only of the chosen object of study. The method of research depends of the research questions. Results of the research must be made clear and conveyed both in cognitive and in artistic form, whereby the artistic product is not mere an illustration of the research, but an indispensable part of it. There shall also be a critical reflexion and a documentation of the research process. One has to place himself in a 'research-context' and to give clear insight in process and result. I have to pay tribute here to Henk Borgdorff, assistant professor for Arts Theory and Research at the Amsterdam School for the Arts, one of our partners, for his clear cut formulations on the matter.

If and when the conditions mentioned have been fulfilled in a satisfactory way the route to sensible PhD's in the arts is open, and there is no reason whatsoever that colleagues from other faculties within the university should put such development in doubt as inferior. On the contrary.

Should research in the arts direct itself to the traditions of the academic world, as far as methodology, verification, repetition and documentation is concerned? Henk Borgdorff explains to us that the fact that knowledge within the arts has an own specific character does not necessarily have consequences for the methods to discover, unveil and communicate that knowledge.

Those who object a more intense approach to each other of artistic and scientific research are making a mistake by not realizing themselves that there is a pluriformity in methods and techniques in scientific research as well. This is already clear from the roughly three models we generally discern: the natural science model (deductive), the social science model (descriptive) and the humanities model (interpretative). They all might apply for research in the arts, which consists of experiments in the arts practice, reflection on it and the interpretation of the arts practice. There is lack of information and understanding for this in the world of the professional arts education institutions as well.

Within the traditional science-of-the-arts we make generally a difference between analysis of the work, analysis of the producing/the making of the work and analysis of the perception of the work. If we apply this to the research in and through the arts, we are quite near: then the work, the making of and the context are the main elements of the research.

Or: what makes an art work to what it is, what should it be, and what is the context where it happens.

Institutional Aspects

What is behind the actual approach of arts by science and the other way round also within the institutional frameworks?

Unfortunately in our systems in the low countries there is as yet the unnatural institutional separation between arts and science. The arts practice is in house, in the Conservatoires and Fine Art Academies and represented by artists/teachers; however in the more academic university circles in the traditional sciences of the arts there is a more historical interest, with less attention for contemporary art and so: the process of the making, the creation. And it is this aspect what is so central in research and the formulation of theories in the arts education and training institutions. There they deliver important contributions to the practice of and the discourse about the arts.

But our general systems as expressed in the 'Bologna-documents' do not bring us sunshine and transparency, which is caused by the systematization of the prae-promotion programmes in an enforced bachelor/master structure.

There is a basic difficulty in fitting the arts education into the bachelor/master system if the legitimation is that artists acquire the same titles, the same diplomas as everywhere else, on the basis of equality.

European Credit Points, curricula and diplomas in the arts are by definition not the same, not equal and not interchangeable. For the dentist, the bookkeeper and the nurse: they of course have to dispose of verifiable skills and knowledge, but creative work in an atelier isn't, although certain technical skills will always be present: no artist should like to do without. But should one give credit points to an art work or a work in progress? A uniform and quantifiable approach has no sense in this respect.

It is sometimes questioned why a fully professional and engaged artist would head for or return to a university to work for six years on a Ph-degree?

In an inspiring and creative graduate school these critics and questions are quickly answered: there one can do without university standardization, no formats, nor for research, nor for production.

Research in the arts means: space and time to give up pre-devised processes and results and to open new roads leading to outcomes which could not have been foreseen.

Research is – in the 'department of creativity' – the phase preceding the realization of a product, a work of art. And the making of such a work is rooted in discussion.

The artist is discussing and negotiating with himself and with others all the time, with equally minded and with enemies or adversaries, the discussion is with tradition and actuality. The art practitioner–researcher is somewhere on the boundary, wrestling relationally with the various conditions, inner and outer, practical and theoretical, creative and imitative, biographical and analytical, as Dallow wrote in 'Practice: A Journal of Visual, Performing and Media Arts'(1998). A post graduate Ph-program in a specially devised graduate school is the podium for this discussion and for these negotiations. The outcomes of this discourse should of course be public.

The arts may in an institutional framework be experienced as a 'house of intractability'. Scientists tend to stick to their subject, their main research question and the official publication standards. One does research into literature, makes interviews, observes, experiments and documents, all with agreed upon methods. In the arts there shall be

space for experiments where one every now and then should drop what one has learned and judged on its own merits time and again. One follows in the first place his intuition, as Francis Bacon said: “chaos breeds images.”

Unlike in the United States and the United Kingdom till recent times in The Netherlands and Belgium there was not a good climate for the crossing of the borders between arts and science. Scientists tend to limit their scopes within their own fields, the arts world was not conscious enough to break through traditions; many arts scientists, like art historians and musicologists, are too conservative.

In general university institutions in our regions react until now quite slow and tend to formatize research in 19th century maps and territories. If this is the case there is no space for the creative and performing arts. But if and when a university gives space to the specificities of the arts school and the latter can keep and fill in this space as far as aims and objectives in training, education, research and production are concerned, the arts school is wise to enter into this relationship and can even profit from the input ages of university and academic thinking and reflection have to offer.

Promotions in the arts at Leiden University

A coalition with the Orpheus Institute Gent and the Conservatoires of Amsterdam and The Hague.

The great majority of the promotions in the Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts at Leiden University aim at subjects which provide ample possibilities for the researcher-musician. To use these possibilities is the absolute condition for the acceptance of a candidate. The creative or performative and research processes should interact. This means that a particular research only can be executed by an artist pertinent to the matter in question, because he or she is a renowned specialist. The research is as a consequence only possible by this person: theme, object, research questions are determined by the respective personalities. On the other side the creative and performance practice of the candidate must be influenced by the findings of the research, through which they also develop their artistry.

Because we aim at the top of our higher scientific education and research system, the quality of both the artistic and the research work must be at top level. Therefore we have decided to establish admission procedures on the basis of a research portfolio and carefully organized an individual supervision system. All candidates have to assist at two-year-curriculum at the beginning of their project with colloquia, lectures, seminars and workshops. Subjects are a.o. theory of science, methodology, theory of our culture and philosophy of art. Here we provide the candidates with knowledge, insights and capabilities that they need to conduct research. On top the doctoral students may need to expend their musical imagination. The core activity is of course the actual individual research project.

In the end the combination of artistic achievement and theoretical reflection leads to a number of promotion sessions, including artistic work such as concerts, performances, master classes, workshops and lecture recitals. The research findings reported in an academic thesis will be defended in public. The thesis should demonstrate what influence the research approach and methods have undergone from the candidate's work as creator or performer.

On the basis of this layout the Leiden University promotions in the arts distinguish themselves from a lot of regular doctorates or PhD's given in the Anglo-American systems, i.e. on the basis of a thesis only, or a composition, or a recital. We have – in the meantime – liaised in a European consortium: MIDAS (Music Institutes with Doctoral Arts Studies) with institutions in London, Glasgow, Helsinki, Oslo, Malmö, Göteborg, and Tallinn.

Although systems, management, procedures and accents show intricate distinctions the basics of these institutions proved to be in common: to use a researching mind in the creation or re-creation of art works is not sufficient. The research should be deeper and broader in scope. The artistic work has raised questions or problems that can be further articulated and analysed only through research. The pattern varies per candidate: the artistic component may outweigh the theoretical one, or vice versa.

The impression that Leiden University only concentrates on music is wrong. The music coalition was happily born in a relatively quick process given a number of equally interested and congenial institutions. At the moment the Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts is developing an identical facility in the area of fine arts, visual arts and design.

During all discussions in the various disciplines an important phenomenon emerged: the enormous differences between the creative, the performance and the pedagogical sector. They correspond more or less with the two main streams in doctoral research: practice-based research, resulting in a body of artistic or pedagogical work and a systematic analysis of the research findings.

practice-as-research, a study in which the research itself consists of a multi – or interdisciplinary creative process and in which the artistic product, supplemented by the research documentation, forms the result of the study. This involves an expansion or renewal of the artistic vocabulary, a search for new forms of artistic expression.

All in all: a promotion at Leiden University through the docARTES Ph-course is for the candidate a work of art in itself. The combination of strongly focussed continued education in the art subject, the research element and the production of the promotion itself.

The masterpiece of art is the way we were able to make this all possible in a complete legal way by using the strong sides of different systems and cycles in two countries. Our group is proud that this could happen.