

Art scientist: Take a break, and make art!

While attending the conference "De derde cyclus: Artistiek onderzoek na Bologna"¹ I was struck with the fact that there was so little communication between universities and art schools. The meeting was intended to investigate if there should be a third cycle in art education and how this should be organized. Considering the fact that the third cycle in higher education in the Netherlands is now only possible within the university, it was striking to observe the absence of the universities during this conference. The art school system could learn a lot from the experience of the universities in teaching in a third cycle. But, maybe even more important, the universities can learn from the way artists work and should consider a more intimate relationship with artists and art education. Visiting this conference could be a new starting point in a future cooperation.

The intuitive and subjective approach of the artist can serve as an example for approaching research in art science. There are already scientists who work in a more or less creative way. The physicist Robert Dijkgraaf states:

"I would say that scientific research is about doing unpredictable things, implying intuition and some measure of randomness. (...) our research is more like an exploration than following a firm path" (Balkema en Slager 2007: 31 in Borgdorff 2007: 4).

If art scientists give the creation of art a try they can get acquainted to an artistic working process. This process leaves more space for intuition and subjectivity, but the artist also faces problems the scientist may not expect. The way of dealing with such problems can be helpful to scientists as well.

In addition the art scientist could gain understanding of art by approaching research artistically. Art is not just a product, there is a process involved. By making art himself, the scientist can get a different view on art.

There are two different but equally interesting extremes. One is using art as a means of doing research in a scientific manner: art based research. The other is making art in a scientific way: research based art. The former makes the scientist rethink his methods and means; the latter his goal. In this essay I will focus on art based research, and by doing this, on the benefits the artistic process could have for scientific research.

Art in science

In paragraph 2.1.1.1. of her PhD thesis Anne Nigten discusses the scientific problems the artist could solve. By including the artist, and by doing so, including “fresh approaches and different perspectives” (Nigten 2006: 28), in scientific research the scientific communication problem can be solved. This inclusion of art in science will not be easy, as can be concluded from Nigten’s argument that “the image most scientists have about the arts has not been updated since the 19th century” (Ibid: 25).

Despite this startling statement, there are quite a lot of scholars who consider the inclusion of the arts in scientific research a requirement, at least for the communication of scientific results. B.K. Ridley even “warns against scientism [as the theory for everything] and recommends arts, as a much needed supplementary ingredient to rescue science” (Ibid: 30).

The artist in science is the problem solver. The most important problem in science seems to be communication. The artist is not the ‘Wild Thinker’ as Nigten observes, but rather a mediator. Different studies “call for the artist to bridge the gap between science and the society” (Ibid: 51). But why include an artist in your scientific research if you could behave like an artist yourself?

Science is influenced by the arts on level of methods according to Peter Weibel. When the methods of science tend to become authoritarian and dogmatic, science turns to arts. The arts are known for the multiplicity of methods. Science uses the methodology of art to renew its own methods and escape from the scientific doctrines (Weibel 1998: 173). Scientists are depending partly on art already. I argue that not only the methodology of the arts is interesting and useful for science. The artistic attitude of looking at the world should be included in science.

Bruno Latour calls for inclusion of artists and other outsiders in science too. But he also points out the artistic expression that is already included in science. The

iconophilic artist makes drawings of plants and animals, maps of the world and portraits of monks and saints (Latour 1998: 1 (own print)). Latour points out that (post)modern art is no longer a communication tool. Most artists are not in the position of mediator anymore. Art has escaped from being a representation, "from the tyranny of [being] "simply objective," "purely representative" quasi-scientific illustrations" (Latour 2004: 36). Art has become iconoclastic.

Latour suggests "scientific visualisation to take over this area of 'representation', as they own the computers and software to model and render their representations, while artists are working on other area of visual and experimental electronic art forms" (Nigten 2006: 76). I would like to see this as an invitation to science to start making (iconophilic) art. Let the artists be, and start your artistic process to produce art that can serve as a foundation for scientific research. Art and science are not two counterparts, they are two different universes as Weibel suggests. "If we could imagine an individual, intelligent enough and comprehensively educated, this individual could move in both universes [art and science] freely" (Weibel 1998: 169). Scientists should get themselves educated in the making of art.

Artistic research by art scientists

The question is how scientists should include the art making process in their work. I will focus on the art scientist in my arguments. As I mentioned above there are two major benefits to gain by including artistic research in art science. The scientist learns from the subjective and intuitive approach typical for the artist and will be able to address his own research in a different and more open way. Furthermore the knowledge of the art itself will increase because the scientist will not only focus on art as a finished work, but on the artistic process that precedes the artwork.

Objectivity and (inter)subjectivity

Anne Nigten argued in her lecture at "De Derde Cyclus" that research should be done from a first person perspective as well as a third person perspective.² The switching between perspectives will broaden the view of the researcher. In art studies the tendency is to ignore the subject (the researcher) and strive for objectivity. This is seen in the distinction that Chiel Kattenbelt makes between research in art and research in science. Scientific research is done with an objectifying and theoretical

attitude. The work of the artist (as researcher) is aimed at experience rather than 'judgements of truth' (*waarheidsbeoordelingen*) on reality. The rationality is thus not found in objectivity, but rather in (inter)subjectivity. Both art and artistic research have a subjective attitude (Kattenbelt 2006: 78).

Artistic research is based on aesthetic judgement. The target of this aesthetic judgement is

"niet het geheel van individuele ervaringen, maar het hypothetisch gemeenschappelijke (lees: intersubjectieve) in de levenservaringen van tijdgenoten die tot eenzelfde leefwereld behoren" (Kattenbelt 2006: 73).

Though artistic research is done with a subjective attitude, the foundation of the research, the aesthetic rationality, is thus intersubjective.

The work of the art scientist should not only be done from an objectifying and theoretical attitude (or third person perspective). Because art is largely subjective, the research done on art could use some (inter)subjectivity as well. By making art the scientist will learn to apply his subjective, first person perspective in a useful and supplementary way.

Methods, intuition and self-criticism

Science has the tendency of working according to well subscribed methods. Although this evidently has its advantages, Weibel demonstrates that scientists need to give other, less known and less founded, methods a chance once in a while. Borgdorff argues that science is "minder rigide en afgebakend dan sommigen in het debat willen geloven" (Borgdorff 2006: 25). He states that the idea that science always works according to a fixed protocol and universal standards rests on a misunderstanding (Ibid: 25).

In spite of these hopeful observations, there is still not enough intuitive scientific research. Scientists should loosen up and dare to break free of the chains that are there methods. Science should not look for other methods in the arts; it should consider copying the way of using these methods that is typical for the arts. By not clinging on to one method, but by surfing through a scale of methods the artist is free to rely on his intuition and to use whatever method suits him right in that particular situation.

An important aspect of scientific research already, reflection plays an even greater role in artistic research. The subject-oriented research is always self

reflexive. Being involved in artistic research implies that the researcher reflects on his own competence to make (the experience of) the art perceptible (Kattenbelt 2006: 79). Self-criticism is thus part of the research. Being intuitive, self-reflexivity is important. The artist is always considering why he chooses different methods.

Pauze, a playful performance

Being an art scientist myself I am currently working on an artistic research. During my MA in *New media and digital culture* I have been focusing on the effects the digital culture has on other cultural fields. My special interest went out to theatre. Many theatre groups have recently been making performances in which the visitor has an active role.

Focusing on the performance *Datsja* made by the theatre group Powerboat I did a dramaturgical research on the playing/ acting visitor of playful performance. Playful performance, a term that I proposed, indicates a type of performance in which play takes the main function. Not only do the actors play, but the visitors play as well. The question I asked myself was: In what way can the visitor of playful performance get the experience of being an actor/ player?³ In this research I joint a theoretical research with the ideas I got when working as a production-dramaturge on *Datsja*. During this period I experienced art as a process rather than a finished work. This helped me adjust my view on art.

Currently I am working on a playful performance myself. For Soirée des Atelier of Huis aan de Werf in Utrecht I will make the playful performance *Pauze*. This playful performance combines an individual experience with an individual in a group experience.⁴ While working on this project I want to research if the conclusions I got out of my theoretical research will proof accurate. With the questions I asked myself during my theoretical research in the back of my mind, I am making a performance by trusting not only on my knowledge, but also on my intuition, my subjective attitude and my capability to reflect on my work. I have worked out the form of the playful performance, by using the knowledge I gained from my theoretical research. But one of the most important freedoms I gave myself is not clinging on to this form.

Playful performance relies on the activity of the visitors. That is why, when in rehearsals, it is vital to invite people who will act as test dummies and can give feedback. If the form I chose does not happen to work out, I am able to change abruptly.

The research I have done for my thesis is partly based on future forms of playful performance. Because the performances of Powerboat and other groups that I have seen did not show all the conditions that seem ideal for playful performance. By making my own playful performance I hope to step closer to this ideal, but I will not be disappointed when I fail to reach it. Artistic research is a matter of trial and error. During and after my artistic working process I will take time to reflect on my work as research and by doing this overcome the errors during the actual staging of *Pauze*.

Conclusion

Science could gain a lot by including not artists but artistic methodology and attitude. The artist himself is busy enough breaking icons and science is probably better in representation in the first place. The methodology and attitude of the artist however, contributes to scientific research in more than one way.

By learning how to work as an artist the scientist opens his perspective. Instead of always trying to be objective and doing research from a third person perspective, the subjective first person perspective could serve the (art) scientist just great. Including and substantiating his opinion or view and comparing it with that of others can offer the researcher a new range of methods and results. Furthermore the intuitive approach on doing research opens up the research as a process. The scientist is no longer attached to his, on beforehand chosen method, but will learn to switch between methods during the research and found these switches with arguments.

By being involved in the art making process, the art scientist has the opportunity to adjust his perspective on art. Most art scientist still look at art as a finished work and reflect, interpret and research on that artwork. Seeing art as a process, which is especially important for the performative arts, the art scientist will gain more knowledge and understanding of the art.

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¹ "De derde cyclus: Artistiek onderzoek na Bologna. Internationale conferentie over de derde cyclus in het hoger kunstonderwijs" (The third cycle: Artistic research after Bologna. International conference on the third cycle in higher art education). Amsterdam: Felix Meritis, October 10 and 11 2007.

² Ibid.

³ The question in my thesis "De spelende bezoeker van playful performance. Een productiedramaturgisch onderzoek naar de rol van de performancebezoeker", reads 'op welke manier kan de bezoeker van playful

performance de ervaring krijgen een speler te zijn?'. *Ervaring* is slightly different from experience, and *speler* means player as well as actor.

⁴ Playful performance can either focus on the visitor as an individual as in Crew's *U – Razende Stilstand* or Hooman Sharifi's *Project NO*, or try to let the visitor play in a group as in Powerboat's *Datsja*.