On the opportunities of performative research in arts education
Jochem Naafs

In March 2013 I presented the lecture performance *Projecting on Der (kommende) Aufstand nach andcompany&Co.* during the third Artaud Forum at Brunel University, London. I had presented this lecture performance before, but this was the first time I came to realize that it was not just a gimmick to present outcomes of a research project as a lecture performance, but that it was actually relevant, since it offered the chance to not only talk about the creative process of the German performance collective andcompany&Co., but to also demonstrate their process. Next to this it offered me the possibility to demonstrate how I influenced the process by being present and vice versa: an aspect of observing that is easily ignored.

Almost two years later I was asked to work on a research project on the potentiality of performative research within the educational structure of the theatre department of HKU University of the Arts Utrecht. I took the opportunity to deepen my knowledge of this subject both by experimenting and by literature studies. By then I had been experimenting more loosely with various working methods outside and inside educational institutes. Some of these methods focused on dissemination of research results and insights like the lecture performance mentioned above, others were actually methods of conducting research in a more or less performative situation. In this article I would like to give an overview of the methods I have applied or developed since.[1] Furthermore I offer a contextualisation of and critical reflection on these methods.

Performative research
Before I introduce these other examples I would first like to elaborate on the idea of performative research. I am aware that this term is – like many others – interpretable in many ways. First it might be interesting to look for a definition of research in general. For this I take a look at the definition as posed by the British Research Excellence Framework (REF). The REF defines research as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared' (REF 2012, p.48).[2] This definition is open to many forms of investigating and sharing, but at the same time is very strict. To be able to call something research one must not only share the results of an investigation – something that could be considered as standard in the arts – but it should also share the process of the investigation itself. It should offer the other an insight into the way the investigation was executed; how the investigation was performed.

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[1] In *Sta me toe je mee te nemen*, an article published in 2016, I write more elaborately about the various experiments and have included my own reflections on these experiments.

[2] The full definition of research according to the REF is: '1. For the purposes of the REF, research is defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared. 2. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It excludes routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques. It also excludes the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research. 3. It includes research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports (REF 2012, p.48)'

How does this relate to performative research? In his manifesto Brad Haseman concludes:

> *Performative research – while it has been fuelled by the practices of artist/researchers and is the most appropriate research paradigm for all forms of artistic practice – is also being used by researchers involved in content creation and production across the creative and cultural industries, especially those engaged in user-led and end-user research* (Haseman 2006, p.9).

Haseman stresses that this type of research is not only relevant for the arts. He considers performative research as a 'multi-method led by practice' which is 'expressed in nonnumeric data, but in forms of symbolic data other than words in discursive text. These include material forms of practice, of still and moving images, of music and sound, of live action and digital code' (2006, p.6). He positions the research next to quantitative and qualitative research and emphases the ideas of practice-led research within it.

In her article on performative research, Hanne Seitz argues that performative research takes a next step on the track started by ethnology and action research. 'Almost always it is a matter of finding out something about practice or for practice (usually in retrospect) rather than developing and discovering something directly through practice' (Seitz 2012, p.4). She argues that performative research

> *does not aim to capture reality in graphs or to describe it in words; nor does it set out to test existing hypotheses, pursue existing questions, or document processes. Rather, it aspires to be one with practice, to activate tacit knowledge, and generate new insights – both on the part of the researchers and the research subjects – while processing, dealing with, and handling practice* (2012, p.4).

What strikes me the most is the combination of generating new insights and being active with the practice itself. Taking the definition of the REF in mind, performative research seems to aim to combine the moment of investigation and the moment of sharing.

In my research project I went looking for methods that are able to do just this. I have been experimenting with four methods: lecture performance, associative writing, contemplative dialogue and merging. Some of these forms are more structured than others. Some of the labels I have used are used by others as well and might need some explanation within this context. In all cases I have executed the methods various times, not as a means of replication in a scientific sense, but rather as a form of iteration: Trial and error in different settings with different people.

Barbara Bolt argues: 'Whilst science methodology demands that experiments are replicable and only verifiable if replication produces the same, the performative principle demonstrates that iteration can never produce the same' (Bolt, 2008, p.8). Next to this approach to verifiability, performative research also questions the idea of validity of truth and offers the idea of a validity of usability as suggested by Daan Andriessen and Joan van Aken in their introduction of their guide to design based academic research (*Handboek ontwerpgericht wetenschappelijk onderzoek*, 2012, p.17). Andriessen and Van Aken call this pragmatic validity and argue that design based academic research

can proof their validity through showing that the 'investigated solutions and interventions indeed provide the intended results for the specified domain of application' (2012, p.17).[3] Considering the practice of performative research, the principal question is: Does it work? Rather then: Is it true?

Performing
In my article published in the previous volume of *Dance Studies in the Netherlands (8)*, *Associative Writing and the Lecture Performance* (2014), I discussed the lecture performance as a form that 'provides both artists-as-teachers and artistic researchers with a performative mode of sharing ideas, insights, questions and the process of searching. It is a device for performative research as well as a means to publish through performing' (Naafs, 2014, p.56).

In addition to this I stressed the aspects of temporality and the need for a live presence of both performer and spectator: the lecture performance offers the opportunity to discuss both the research process and the research results (Naafs, 2015). Obviously these last aspects do not discriminate the lecture performance from the lecture in general. What does, is that the presenter can take a fluid approach, as De Vietri (2013) puts it, and combine the more objective approach of the lecture with a more personal and/or artistic and thus subjective approach of the performance. Where most lectures have a clear goal of communicating the results of a specific project, lecture performances activate the audience by merging this goal with a less teleological approach in presenting something for an audience to experience.

Associative Writing and the Lecture Performance was mainly based on a lecture performance with the identical title that I was working on at that time. I performed this lecture five times in 2014 and 2015[4] and I came to realize that one important aspect was lacking – or maybe not lacking completely, but I did not give it enough attention: the role my audience played. Of course I needed my audience to be there; without them I could not perform. And yes, I gave them the opportunity to reply afterwards with questions and remarks. I took a quite vulnerable position by staying on the stage and waiting for reactions to come. What I didn't do was offer certain tools to my audience to enable them to react. I had an active audience, but I silenced them during my performance. Too late I realized that it is hard for the audience to turn into an active public after my performance.

In other words: I shared my research results and the way I had executed my investigation, and my lecture performance was a personal method of trying out, but I did not open up this private endeavour for my audience. The lecture performance itself was not a performative research, because it didn't involve the audience – besides them having to be there for the performance to exist. Of course, looking at the description given before, this is not necessary for it to be seen as a lecture performance, but looking at the lecture performance as performative research this would be essential. As Falk Hübner stresses in his article *Hard Times*, it would be interesting 'to use the form of a lecture performance in academic contexts not so much as a means of disseminating

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[3] 'onderzochte oplossingen of interventies inderdaad in het aangegeven toepassingsdomein de beoogde uitkomsten geeft' (Van Aken and Andriessen, 2012, p.17).
[4] The lecture performance *Associative Writing and the Lecture Performance* was performed in Utrecht for students of the MA Scenography on December 4, 2014, twice during the polyphonic festival *Formidable – Fort Minable* of HKU on January 18, 2015, on February 18, 2015 in Deventer for students of the Honours Programme of ArtEZ and at Theater Kikker, Utrecht, on March 13, 2015.

research findings, but rather as an integral part of the process of both artistic work and research process' (Hübner, 2015).

Hübner stresses the importance of an active audience. He attempts 'to utilize the presence of an audience of a conference to garner comments and questions. In this way the audience members themselves - as artistic or academic peers - become active participants in the research and artistic process' (Hübner, 2015). Although I agree that the sole attempt and the experience of sharing the lecture performance in itself could already be seen as an active form of research, I think it is more interesting to really work with your audience as peers, as Hübner also wishes to do.

Writing

In *Associative Writing and the Lecture Performance* I also discussed a particular approach in writing that I use and that I became aware of when I was asked to elaborate on how I usually work. In November 2014 I spoke to some colleagues at HKU University of the Arts Utrecht about associative writing: a writing method that is both liberating and restraining: 'I associate and connect. I start writing and I always create complete sentences and complete paragraphs. But the paragraph that follows could contain something completely different, something that pops up in my thoughts when writing' (Naafs, 2015, p.55). Being challenged by some of my colleagues I started to explicate my method in such a way that others could use it. I use it to write texts for performances, but also to rewrite minutes and to reflect on input of others. Associative writing consists of 5 parts:

1. Choose an occasion and start writing.
2. When you are writing, write complete sentences and finish the paragraph you have started.
3. If any associations occur that do not fit the paragraph you are working on, keep these for a next paragraph.
4. A next paragraph can contain something completely different. For example something that popped up in your thoughts when writing the previous paragraph.
5. Try not to stop writing for too long. You can pause for a moment, but if you seem to get stuck, solve this by writing. You can always write down: 'I don't know what to write', or write about the space you are in.

Since then I have been using it myself more explicitly, but more important: I have asked others to write like this. On at least 15 occasions students from both the ArtEZ Bachelor of Dance and the HKU Bachelor of Theatre in Education, colleagues of HKU and others have been writing associatively for a variety of reasons. Students wrote down their first thoughts about a research project, or their very first ideas about an upcoming solo or duet they would have to create. Professionals used it as a form of writing feedback or reflections. On almost all occasions I asked the participants of this collaborative writing exercise to share what they wrote down by reading it in public. This turned out to be a very fruitful bonus and now I consider it an essential part of associative writing as performative research. Then again, I also encourage students to use this method of writing more individually as a means of gathering material for both research projects and putting concepts for performances on paper.

Reading

In September 2014 I took up the position of lecturer for the Honours Programme Theory and Research of ArtEZ. In one of the first classes, I organized a contemplative dialogue based on the article *On using ANT for studying information systems: a (somewhat) Socratic dialogue* by Bruno Latour. The aim of this class was twofold. 1. To stimulate a dialogue between students of various disciplines and between students and teachers. 2. To introduce the concept of discourse to students.

A couple of years prior to this, Bart van Rosmalen introduced the contemplative dialogue to me.[5] It is a dialogue that follows a quite rigid timing and alternates between moments of writing and moments of speaking. The form was supposedly created by and for monks. The contemplative dialogue consist of six steps:

1. Read and select a passage.
2. Copy the passage you chose and add a personal explanation.
3. In free order all participants read out their texts.
4. Quote one of the other participants and add a personal explanation.
5. In free order all participants read out their new texts.
6. Finally an open dialogue follows.

Van Rosmalen writes about the dialogue in his PhD thesis. He argues that it has a beginning, a clearly structured course and an ending. 'There is distinct space and time in which the dialogue takes place. This reinforces the ritual character of the dialogue and the effort of the participants to come to a good performance' (Van Rosmalen 2016, pp. 192-193, translation Naafs).[6] By using the contemplative dialogue I made sure that all voices would be heard and the input of the students became part of the discussion, not just as a reaction to the thoughts of the author, but also as a potential starting point for other students.

I agree with Van Rosmalen that this dialogue could be seen as a form of play (*spel*) and as the same time as theatre (*schouw-spel*) (2016, p.193). He follows Gadamer in arguing that the spectators of the theatre are not outside of the play, but that the play happens within the spectators, essentially labelling the spectators as players or actors. Within the contemplative dialogue all participants become players when they perform the original text as well as their own text by reading it out. This performance is then recycled and performed again in the fourth step of the dialogue. The participants are constantly shifting between reading, writing and listening, shifting between performing and spectating. Van Rosmalen argues that especially this shifting brings participants together into one joint performance (2016, p.193). He argues that the performance is 'making public: getting yourself into the position to make that what has to be said public and to become public as well; by being the spectator of what someone else has to say' (Van Rosmalen 2016, p.193, translation Naafs).[7]

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[5] The contemplative dialogue is one of the work methods described on the website of the Research Centre for Arts and Professional Development of HKU: http://www.musework.nl/nl/page/526/contemplatieve-dialoog. A more detailed description is given on www.connectingconversations.nl/page/4677/nl.

[6] 'Het gesprek heeft een begin, een duidelijk gestructureerd verloop en een eind. Er is een duidelijke plaats en tijd waarop de dialoog wordt uitgevoerd. Dat versterkt het rituele karakter en de inzet van de betrokkenen om tot een goede opvoering te komen' (Van Rosmalen 2016, pp.191-192).

[7] 'De opvoering is publiek makend: zelf in de positie komen om dat wat er te zeggen is publiek te maken, maar ook zelf publiek worden door de toeschouwer te zijn van wat een ander te zeggen heeft' (Van Rosmalen 2016, p.193).

Having a contemplative dialogue with students enables them to discuss a text thoroughly without asking them to do an individual close reading. My experience is that many students in art schools are not exposed to reading a lot. This approach helps them to get over the fear of reading; similarly like associative writing helps them to overcome the fear of writing. Though I wish to stress here that these approaches to reading and writing should not be the only approaches. The feedback given by students on this working method is very positive. Students enjoy the dialogue itself, stating that they get a better understanding of the original text and become aware of the various interpretations people might have. Students also transfer the method itself. Fourth year students of HKU Theatre have applied the dialogue in their making process with amateur actors to be able to discuss the subjects they wished to work on.

Since then I have organized various contemplative dialogues with students based on written texts and one with audience members of the performance *SHIROKURO* by Nicole Beutler, Tomoko Mukaiyama and Jean Kalman in Theater Kikker, Utrecht. This last experience led to the idea of Merging.

Merging
The down side to both the contemplative dialogue and associative writing is that, although they stimulate participants to act, this acting comes in a very discursive and language-based manner. And the possibilities of using less directive and more poetic language, is what attracted me in the lecture performance. This stimulated me to start thinking about the possibility of merging some of these forms together. Together with Bart van Rosmalen and Lotte Wijers I developed the concept for Merging. Using the title *Merging Lecture Performance and Contemplative Dialogue* we executed our first experiment during the ISIS conference #2: *Play, Perform, Participate* in Utrecht.

The working method starts from a particular performative input from the presenters. From there the dialogue develops using the basic steps of the contemplative dialogue as described above. With the help of a collection of objects, attendees reflect and react on each other in a way they choose (thus, not necessarily in a verbal way). Every round of reaction starts with a contemplative moment. After some rounds of reactions on reactions, the group wraps up the session with a reflective dialogue. Merging challenges the participant to perform both as a form of reflection and as a form of creation. Merging is a working method that challenges participants to associate in words, images and movement.

After this first experiment we carried out the method of Merging another five times. Two of these experiments were with colleagues of HKU and professionals from the arts. For the second of these two experiments we asked two theatre makers to take care of the performative input. This changed the focus slightly – in our own input we did refer to some of the concepts that we found interesting that related to the working method itself – but still the main idea of Merging stood tall. The other three experiments were somewhat different again. We used Merging as a method for reflection for students of HKU Theatre. This proved to be more difficult, especially with the groups that had a positive experience during the workshops they reflected on. The group who had a harder time during the actual 7-week workshop were able to use Merging as a means to turn this experience into something positive. In May 2016 I took upon another experiment with Merging, using it as a reflection tool for second year students of

the ArtEZ Bachelor of Dance.[8] These students were particularly enthusiastic about this process of remixing their material with the ideas and works of others. It gave them new insights on their own work.

Important to Merging is the improvisational character of the method. Although largely set in time, following the steps of the contemplative dialogue, Merging challenges its participants to improvise. In his article on improvisation as a research practice, Guy Cools, refers to three distinctive qualities or characteristics of improvisation as suggested by Elisabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold in their introduction to *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (2007): it is generative, relational and temporal (2015, p.66). These three aspects of improvisation are embraced by Merging. In all six experiments Merging proved to be a quite unique experience to the participants. It stimulated *them* to act, to perform in the here and now, using objects, words and their bodies. It tickled both rational thinking and associative doing.

Comparing
The four methods discussed could be summarized as follows:

- The lecture performance is an organizer-centred method, which makes the audience relatively passive and is mainly focussed on dissemination.
- Associative writing is a participant-centred method, which actively involves the individual participants and mainly works as a research method.
- The contemplative dialogue serves both participant and organizer and allows both parties to be active in a collective and free manner.
- Merging starts of as a more organizer-centred method, but swiftly changes to a method that focuses on all participants. It allows for very active, free and open exchange and stimulates the collective process.

All these four methods turned out to be eye-openers to many professionals, teachers and students in the arts. They do not only trigger a more investigative and curious attitude, they also stimulate creativity in other fields than the discipline of the person: reading, writing, talking, moving and working with objects. They do not necessarily deepen, but for sure broaden the knowledge of the topics and issues raised during the forms. They offer valuable skills to students and professionals alike and furthermore they are applicable in various situations. Students and professionals use the methods themselves in research projects and artistic projects and through this they share the methods with others.

Based on these methods and the ideas on performative research of Haseman, Hübner, Van Rosmalen and Seitz I came to five conditions for this form of research.

Performative research is:
- (Partially) collective;
- Merging objectivity and subjectivity;
- Non-teleological;
- A combination of disseminating and doing (i.e. the method of research);
- Activating.

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[8] In this case the students reflected on their own work and that of their fellow students. Two weeks earlier 14 students had presented 7 duets and we used Merging as a means to rethink the duets itself and the process that lead to these duets.

Projecting

Nevertheless more work is needed? This research could gain more strength by inquiring more thoroughly with students how they experience these methods. Furthermore the question is how these methods relate to other methods of doing and disseminating (practice-led/ practice-oriented) research within the arts and arts education. To what extend could they replace existing methods or would they rather add to these? And of course: How do they relate to the artistic practices of students and professionals?

On the 19th of May 2016 I presented some of these ideas at the study day Practice-oriented research in Universities of Applied Sciences organized by Facta.[9] Various fields expressed interest in this approach, ranging from design to business. The experiments I undertook so far were largely with students from various artistic disciplines, with an extra emphasis on students from dance and theatre, since I am a lecturer in these disciplines. I do consider this form of research the most relevant for these disciplines, since there main expression is performative as well. But – as Brad Haseman already mentioned in his manifesto – performative research could also proof relevant for other disciplines.

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