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Chapter I

# The Conflict of the Faculties

On theory, practice and  
research in professional  
arts academies



# Context

This opening chapter signals the beginning (in the Netherlands at least) of the debate on research in the arts. It contains the text of a lecture I delivered at the expert meeting ‘Kunst als Onderzoek’ (Art as Research), held at Amsterdam’s Felix Meritis centre on 6 February 2004. It also marks the creation of a new type of professorial chair known as *lectoraat* at the Dutch universities of the arts. In my research group Art Research, Theory and Interpretation (ARTI) at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, the rationale of artistic research – and in particular the relationship between theory and practice in the arts and in arts education – was a subject of lively debate. The third part of the chapter, which urges institutional recognition for artistic research, was published in abridged form on 29 September 2005 in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, under the title ‘Emancipatie “faculteit der kunsten” nodig’ (Emancipation of ‘Arts Faculties’ Needed). Later, in 2010, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) funded a modest pilot project for two practice-based PhD studentships in fine art and design.

This chapter develops a line of reasoning containing three elements:

1. To understand what research in the arts involves, we must be fully aware of the tension and interaction between artistic practice and theoretical reflection which are characteristic of the creative and performing arts.
2. Contrary to widespread belief, the unique nature of knowledge in art (as compared to more conventional forms of scholarly knowledge) does not justify any unique methodology of research. ‘Art knowledge’, as embodied in the practices and products of art, is accessed by artistic research through both cognitive and artistic means.
3. Research *in* the arts is of equal value to research *on* the arts, and should therefore be treated equally at the institutional level.

Two strands of thought, or ‘agendas’, pervade all the chapters of this book: the agendas of theoretical comprehension and political justification. Or more correctly, the emergence of the field of artistic research is characterised by the intertwining of these two agendas. Ideas are mobilised and put into action, and they exert their performative force on institutions and situations. Institutions and situations, along with people and instruments, are brought to bear to make ideas happen. This *constructivist realism* (Latour) is characterised by contingency: it is a proposal to reinterpret and reconfigure the state of art and academia.

Subsequent chapters will focus more closely on the specificity of the knowledge embodied in art and on the methodological heterogeneity of artistic research. The opposition I implied here between ‘cognitive’ and ‘artistic’ is unfortunate, as the artistic itself – both the creative faculties and the aesthetic experience – should be considered to belong to the domain of the cognitive. It would be better here to counterpose the artistic to the conceptual, rather than to the cognitive (cf. chapter 2, page 48).

## Theory and practice

To understand what artistic research is, it is vital to explore the relationships between practice and theory in the arts. By outlining four ideal-typical (but not mutually exclusive) perspectives on the relation between [...] theory and practice, I will try to

elucidate and refine the various viewpoints one can encounter in the world of higher arts education. I distinguish (a) the *instrumental* perspective, (b) the *interpretive* perspective, (c) the *performative* perspective and (d) the *immanent* perspective.

In chapter 2, these four perspectives will translate into three perspectives on research in the arts. In research where artistic practice serves as both a method and an epistemological resource, the performative and immanent perspectives merge together. Artistic practices and artworks are both instruments and outcomes here.

a) The *instrumental* perspective suggests that ‘theory’ serves the creative process or performance practice in the arts. This viewpoint, predomi-

nant in professional arts schools, understands theory first of all as a body of technical professional knowledge. Each art discipline thus has its own ‘theory’ – instrumental knowledge specific to the craft, needed to practise the art form in question. Examples are the theory of editing in film, the theory of harmony and counterpoint in music, or Stanislavski’s psycho-technique in theatre.

Yet beyond the technical know-how and professional knowledge often referred to as theory, the instrumental perspective also embraces theory or theoretical research of an exploratory or applied nature. This might, for instance, involve research into a specific use of materials in visual arts, dramaturgic research into a theatrical text, or even the current fad of applying information technology in artistic practice. In all such cases, theory or theoretical research, just like the body of technical knowledge, is used *in the service of* artistic practice. Theory, as it were, furnishes the tools and material knowledge that are applied to the artistic process or product.

This instrumental perspective is notably found in higher music education (at conservatoires). In visual arts schools, the interpretive perspective is more prominent. For a reflection on the Deleuzianisation of the art school, see Boomgaard 2012. For the issue of research in higher music education, see Borgdorff and Schuijjer 2010.

The primacy of this instrumental understanding of theory in higher professional art schools today also colours the discussions there on the relation between theory and practice. As a consequence, it influences beliefs about the relationship between art and science, as well as the ways that people perceive ‘research in the arts’. In my view, the instrumental perspective reinforces the notion that artistic research should consist primarily of applied research, and that any results of theory development should serve artistic practices and products. Often this view is pervaded by what I would call the technical-scientific paradigm – a frame of thought in which the laboratory, the conventions of the exact sciences, and the empirical cycle of discovery and justification form the benchmark for experimentation in the arts. I will return to this later.

To a considerable extent, the opacity and indeterminacy of the discourse on theory and practice in the arts, as well as on artistic research, derives from not knowing whether particular standpoints are drawing on the instrumental perspective and on the technical-scientific model, or not.

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b) The *interpretive* perspective holds that theory provides reflection, knowledge, and understanding with respect to artistic practices and products. Historically, this view is associated with academic disciplines like theatre studies and musicology, which try to facilitate understanding of artistic practice from a certain ‘retrospective’ theoretical distance.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, ‘theory’ basically involves any form of reflection on artworks, or on the production or the reception of art, that rises above the level of the craft itself. Such reflection has gained wide currency in the ‘grand theories of the humanities’ like hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, pragmatism, and critical theory.

In contexts such as fine arts academies or artists’ workspaces, the central focus is on research *in* the arts, rather than *on* the arts. Such practice-based research does not stand in isolation, however, from theoretical reflections as referred to here. An understanding of artistic processes and products from a philosophical, ethical, historical, hermeneutic, reconstructive, deconstructive, or generally contextualising point of view is (or should be) part of any artistic research. That is why so many people are now arguing the importance of cultural studies.

In educational practice at schools for the arts, the amount of emphasis put on ‘theory’ in the interpretive sense seems inversely proportional to the amount of time spent on ‘theory’ in the sense of professional training. Music theory as professional and instrumental expertise, for instance, dominates musical training at the Dutch conservatoires, which have never developed any tradition of theoretical reflection that extends beyond the level of the craft. In developing and planning practice-based masters and PhD programmes in the arts (which I will return to below), one needs to devote far more attention to theory from the interpretive perspective, not least with a view to future academic accreditation.

1. The model and inspiration for this perspective and attitude is the Greek *theoros*, from which our word *theory* derives. A *theoros* was an official envoy sent by Greek cities to observe and report back on public festivities and ceremonies. His participation in social and religious gatherings consisted of distancing himself from what was going on, absorbing it and mentally registering it, so that he could later report on it in a particular way. *Theoria* – which involves consideration and contemplation, a scientific, philosophical or more generally intellectual task – is equally a part of art theory as *technè*, the received or acquired talent to practise the artistic profession on the basis of technical know-how and professional knowledge.

A distinction is introduced here between world revelation and world constitution. This will return regularly in subsequent chapters. It often seems as if we have to choose between hermeneutics (or scientific realism) and constructivism. Towards the end of the book, however, and explicitly in chapters 9 and 11, I will make it clear that this does not involve an opposition, but an 'articulation' that is at once real and artificial. Whenever this is explicitly or more indirectly at issue, I will provide an annotation ('constructivist realism') to point it out.

c) Whereas the interpretive approach addresses, in a sense, the 'world-revealing' nature of art theory and research, the *performative* perspective focuses on their 'world-constituting' quality. I am suggesting here the metatheoretical insight that theory is not 'innocent', and that the instrumental perspective, as well as the theoretical distance with respect to art that I subsequently discussed, both foster an understanding of art which *itself* constitutes a fertile ground and starting point for new art practices and products.

By highlighting this metatheoretical perspective, I wish to emphasise more specifically that *theory itself is a practice*, and that theoretical

approaches always partially shape the practices they focus on. Whether we are dealing with the theory of linear perspective, classical rhetoric, the twelve-tone technique, set theory in serial music, or insights into the cultural meanings and societal functions of art, the performative power of theory not only alters the way we look at art and the world, but it also makes these into what they are.

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That art practitioners can be sceptical about theory – even to the point of developing a misplaced aversion to it – is perhaps not just because some theories seem far afield from the actual practice of art, but also because the performative power of theory *competes* with the performative power of art. On the other hand, thinkers about art who take unnecessarily reticent or aloof attitudes towards artistic practice (especially that of the present day), and who develop their own codes to institutionally protect their 'profession' from artistic practice, may be exhibiting a similar perception. Both sides show a limited understanding of the interaction and reciprocal influence of theory and practice. Not only do thinkers and doers need each other, but in a certain sense thinkers are also doers, and vice versa.

d) The *immanent* perspective hence reminds us that there is also no such thing as 'innocent' practice. Practices are 'sedimented spirit' (Adorno).



Action theory, phenomenology, and philosophy of science have taught us that every practice, every human action, is infused with theory. Naive practice does not exist in this respect. All practices embody concepts, theories, and understandings. Artistic practices do so in a literal sense, too – no practices and no materials exist in the arts which are not saturated with experiences, histories, or beliefs. There is no unsigned material, and that is one reason why art is always reflexive. There is no ‘natural law’ of art; its nature is second nature, preshaped by history, culture, and theory. This gives the lie to that modernist view in the arts which once championed the purification of the medium.

An additional consideration that applies in the arts is that the knowledge and experience embodied in their media will always, to some degree, manage to evade the identifying and levelling gaze of rationality, thereby escaping discursive translation. Philosophical aesthetics has always acknowledged this, from Baumgarten to Adorno and Derrida. Nevertheless, the unique nature of knowledge in art must not tempt us to oppose art practice to art theory. Doing is also thinking, albeit an exceptional form of thinking.

Common to artistic practice and theoretical reflection is that both relate to the existing world. But art knowledge is always also embodied in form and matter. Creative processes, artistic practices, and artworks all incorporate knowledge which simultaneously shapes and expands the horizons of the existing world – not discursively, but in auditory, visual, and tactile ways, aesthetically, expressively, and emotively. This ‘art knowledge’ is the subject, as well as partly an outcome, of artistic research as defined here.

## Research in the arts

The frequent plea for convergence between artistic and academic research is a stark reflection of the equally lamented schism between those two spheres of activity. But in spite of the many recog-

### ‘Partly ...’

In the debate on research in the arts, there is disagreement about whether, or to what extent, the artistic outcomes of the research (the concrete artworks and art practices generated by the research) are to be discursively framed – that is, accompanied by a contextualisation, a theoretical frame, an interpretation, or a reconstruction or documentation of the research process. This is one of the issues of demarcation in the foundational debate. My position is that this discursive framing is necessary. The key arguments for this will be given in chapters 2, 7, and 10. To forego such framing implies a departure from academia. That said, the discursive forms in which the framing may take place are highly varied. They do not confine themselves to conventional academic discourse.

The qualification ‘partly’ will be encountered regularly in subsequent chapters.

nised areas of contiguity and overlap, some observers continue to insist on the (both theoretically and institutionally) *sui generis* nature of research in the arts in comparison to that in [traditional] universities. This is justified as follows: Even though the institutional division between university and art education is an unnatural one, and does not do justice to a field of practice in which thinking and doing are interwoven, the link between artistic research and artistic practice at schools of the arts is a very direct one. Artistic practice is already ‘in house’, as it were – embodied by the artists that teach there and in the practical training on offer. Art education thus already maintains intimate links to the world of art practice – to orchestras, ensembles, and theatre companies, to production companies and artists’ workspaces, to galleries and studios. An additional argument is that the largely historical focus of the traditional academic humanities severely curtails any attention to the contemporary arts – and hence also to the creative process in the arts – whereas those very themes are central to both the training and the research in art schools. It is rightly pointed out that research and theory development in art academies and workspaces, by its close proximity to current artistic practice, makes a vital contribution to the discourse on art. It can also positively influence the nature and level of the public debate on the arts.

The *sui generis* nature of artistic research also fuels the international debate<sup>2</sup> on whether to conform to the conventions of academic research, such as standards of methodology, verifiability, replicability, and reporting. Opinions on such issues are underlain to a significant extent by beliefs and misunderstandings about the supposed uniqueness of artistic research methods. I would argue as follows: Even if one accepts that the knowledge embodied in art is of a different order than the more ‘conventional’ forms of academic or scientific knowledge, that does not mean the methods for access-

The reports published by the UK Council for Graduate Education and Arts and Humanities Research Council not only influenced the creation of chapters 1 and 2 of this book, but they also aided the establishment of the docARTES doctorate programme.

2. See e.g. Davies 2002; Dallow 2005; Bauer 2001. For the debate in the UK, see also UKCGE 1997; UKCGE 2001; DES 2002; Nelson and Andrews 2003; AHRB 2003; and AHRC 2007.

ing, retrieving, and disseminating such knowledge are also different. Both those who would welcome a convergence of artistic and academic research, and those who would oppose such a development, frequently show a limited (if not short-sighted) awareness of the broad diversity of methods and techniques in systematic research.

The limited scientific notion commonly held on both sides is that of the empirical-deductive approach. To make matters worse, both sides depict it in the form of an obsolete empiricist caricature. One of them would like any experimentation in the arts to be comparable to laboratory trials, while the other argues against submitting to the presumed constrictive frameworks of this scientific model. It is not really surprising that both sides have failed to take heed of recent trends in the theory of science, which have led to a 'liberalisation' and diversification of research approaches and to a critique of the 'fact-value dichotomy' (Putnam 2002). Most of the disputants come from the world of the art schools and are not yet sufficiently informed in this area.

In raising the issue of the specific place and quality of artistic research, we should not seek confrontations with experimental research in the empirical-deductive exact sciences, nor with socially engaged empirical-descriptive research in the social sciences, and also not with the cultural-analytical, aesthetic, or critical-hermeneutic interpretive approaches in the humanities. However, to adopt one-sidedly the 'natural science' model, the 'social science' model, or the 'humanities' model [...] will produce a myopic understanding of what is really going on in the arts. The many divergent approaches to artistic products and processes each have their own *raison d'être* – and that is also reflected in the widely varied research mandates of various professors who have begun doing research in art schools in recent years.

Not only experimentation *in* practice, but also reflection *on* practice and interpretation *of* practice, may be part of research in the arts as defined here. The *sui generis* place and nature of artistic research

This is a central theme in this book: Does artistic research have a methodological framework of its own? My position is yes and no. Yes, because one specific characteristic of artistic research is that artworks and art practices form an integral part of the research process – the research takes place in and through art practice. No, because a researcher can additionally make use of a variety of methods, techniques, and perspectives, whether drawn from the humanities, the social sciences or the natural sciences (methodological pluralism).

Here I touch upon three elements that are characteristic of artistic research: the type of knowledge at hand within this research, the method through which that knowledge is articulated, and the way in which it is disseminated. In chapter 2, and later in chapter 7, these three elements will be supplemented by four additional elements: the specific intent of the endeavour, the artistic research question, its originality, and the dual artistic and academic context of the research.

is legitimised in part by the four perspectives on theory and practice in the arts discussed above, as well as by the institutional intertwining of theory and practice in art schools. This special position is legitimised more specifically by the exceptional nature of ‘knowledge in art’, as well as by the exceptional ways in which research findings are articulated and communicated.

When the familiar frameworks of work analysis, production analysis, and reception analysis are transposed from research *on* the arts into research *in* and *through* the arts, that reduces the

distance to the object of research to such a degree that the work of art, the creative process, and the signifying context themselves all become constituent parts of the research. In the medium itself – in the creative process, the artwork, and its effects – perspectives are revealed and constituted, horizons are shifted, and new distinctions are articulated. The specific nature of artistic research can be pinpointed in the way that it *both cognitively and artistically* articulates this revealment and constitution of the world, an articulation which is nor-

‘... both cognitively and artistically ...’ See annotation on page 17.

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mativ, affective, and expressive all at once – and which also, as it were, sets our moral, psychological, and social life into motion.

This demarcation of research in the arts – extending from abstract knowledge to instrumental know-how – now brings me to three recommendations for conducting such research. I hope they will provide a stimulus to further discussion.

1. Artistic processes or products are essential components of and in artistic research. The choice of research methods is free and will vary with the research questions. The methodological diversity referred to above, however, is always complementary to the use made of the medium itself.
2. Research results consist partly of one or more artistic productions or presentations. The results communicate the artistic outcomes both cognitively and artistically. Far from being a mere illustration accompa-

nying the research, the artistic outcomes thus form an indispensable component of it.

3. Critical reflection on the research process, and documentation of it in discursive form, is also part of the research results. The researcher is obligated to the research community to situate each study in a broader research context and to elucidate both the process and the outcome in accordance with customary standards.

‘The researcher is obligated ...’  
At the expert meeting ‘Art as Research’ in Amsterdam, a heated debate erupted between proponents and opponents of such recommendations. Some people vehemently objected that such imperatives were being imposed on artistic practice by external forces (by ‘Bologna’; cf. chapter 5, page 116).

## The conflict of the faculties<sup>3</sup>

In 1798, Immanuel Kant published his pamphlet entitled *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (The Conflict of the Faculties), in which he urged an end to the subordination of the ‘lower faculties’ in the universities to the ‘higher faculties’. The lower faculties of Kant’s day and age, which studied the natural sciences, humanities, and philosophy, were entitled to award only masters degrees, whereas the higher faculties, which dealt with theology, law, and medicine, could offer doctorates. The higher faculties were accountable to the church or the state, just as today the practice of religion, law, and medicine still falls under the jurisdiction of clerical or secular authorities, which protect the professions and regulate professional practice.

When the late eighteenth-century authorities tried to interfere with the content of Kant’s philosophical treatise *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason), published in 1794, he resisted such interference, arguing vigorously for freedom of research in the lower faculties, which were oriented primarily to pure scientific research rather than to professional qualification. Kant’s appeal helped to foster the intellectual climate that made possible the founding of the Friedrich Wilhelm (later Humboldt) University in Berlin in 1809. Besides lending institutional legitimacy to freedom of research, the university also granted the lower faculties the right to educate students for the doctorate.

The time has now arrived to make a similar appeal for the liber-

3. I am indebted here to Ken Friedman (2002).

ation of what we might provokingly call the ‘lowest faculty’ – that of art education and research. Just as the implicit hierarchy between fundamental and applied research was abandoned some time ago in the Dutch academic world – as reflected in the renaming of the Netherlands Organisation for Pure Scientific Research (ZWO) to Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) – it is now time to grant equal opportunities to artistic research as conducted in art education institutions. As a corollary, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) should receive back its old name, the Royal Institute of Sciences, Literature and Fine Arts, by which we would acknowledge that science and art make equally vital, if dissimilar, contributions to culture.

In concrete terms this would mean, first of all, opening the existing direct and indirect academic funding mechanisms to support research in the arts as defined here. In other words, structural funding for research in higher professional art schools needs to be broadened, and augmented to a level similar to that available to other institutions of higher education. In addition, professional art schools must be eligible to compete for grants and other funding, to create research traineeships, and to allocate staff to assessment committees. The ‘lowest faculty’ should further be enabled to set up properly funded ‘practice-based’ masters and PhD programmes in the arts.

Eighteenth-century faculties psychology spoke of the different ‘faculties’ of the human mind. Present-day cognitive science has brought these faculties back onto an equal footing.

The faculties of the human mind are not subject to a value hierarchy. The institutional faculties, in which those human faculties are challenged and utilised, therefore have the right to equal treatment.

