

Bridging the Gap: A Study of Artistic Research in Composition in Flanders

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Abstract

In this article an exploratory study of artistic research in music composition in Flanders (Belgium) is presented. More specifically, the interaction between artistic practice and research in master and doctoral research projects is examined. The results indicate that there are three gaps, one between the discourses on artistic research and results of artistic researchers, another between the artistic practice and the research part and a last one between master and postmaster research. Next the author makes proposals to tackle these problems, improve the dissemination of research outputs and suggests to focus on a shared environment for composition research and the expression of an explicit design and method, in dialogue with existing knowledge fields in music composition.

Keywords: *Music Composition, Artistic Research, Practice-based Research, Research Training, Reflective Research*

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Introduction

In a recent overview of artistic research in music in Sweden Lützow-Holm (2013) observes that the methods and developments of theories in this research have broadly reflected the norms applying to humanities and social science research. More experimental and exploratory approaches have been missing although exploring knowledge in and through practice has become the self-defined mission of artistic research. Croft (2015) adds that according to his own experience, a wide gap exists between the texts written about composition research, for example research proposals, and the actual research and composition practice.

In this article I examine if the previous observations also apply to artistic research in music composition in Flanders. Based on a study of doctoral dissertations and master papers, complemented by an online questionnaire, I want to obtain an overview of this research in the Flemish institutions for higher music education. Next I discuss the main approaches and problems and formulate a number of proposals for the future development of artistic research in composition.¹

This study is based on the concept that artistic research is characterized by a close interaction between research and artistic practice (Borgdorff 2012, Kjørup 2011). Knowledge from both domains influences each other and creates a hybrid field in which no clear separation between both can be made. In the present article I examine how artistic practice and fields of knowledge, including artistic research, are integrated in the design and method of the papers and dissertations. The presented analysis is not to be misunderstood as an examination of the more *general* research qualities of these research projects.

As a last introductory remark it is important to note that research at the Flemish institutions for higher music education is rather young. Artistic research appeared after 2000 and the first musician obtained a PhD in the arts in 2007.

Research Design and Method

The main sources of the present study consist of five recent PhD dissertations, eleven papers of masters students in composition and an online questionnaire.² Other research activities and results such as working papers, conference lectures or performances on research festivals are not taken into account. All authors of artistic PhD dissertations in music composition, obtained before July 2014, were asked to participate in this study,³ and the five dissertations, analyzed in this article are:⁴

- ‘Gecomponeerde uitvoerders: het musicerende lichaam vanuit compositorisch perspectief’ (2011) of Paul Craenen
- ‘Exploring the symbiosis of Western and non-Western music’ (2013) of Olmo Cornelis
- ‘Sounding sound art: a study of its definition, origin, context and techniques’ (2013) of Laura Maes
- ‘Imitatio et aemulatio’ (2011) of Piet Swerts
- ‘Sergei Prokofievs’ Maddalena als voorstudie tot De Vuurengel - Onderzoek bij de instrumentatie van Maddalena’ (2012) of Stefan Van Puymbroeck

The eleven *master papers* are geographically spread in Flanders and were made by students at the following institutions: Royal Conservatory/University College Ghent (3 papers), Royal Conservatoire Antwerp/Artesis Plantijn University College (4), Royal Conservatory/Erasmus University College Brussels (2) and the Lemmens Campus/Luca School of Arts (2). Table 1 displays the dates on which the dissertations and papers were finalized.

Year	Number of PhD dissertations	Number of master papers
2011	2	1
2012	1	1
2013	2	6
2014	0	3

Figure 1. Table showing dates and number of dissertations.

Quality and diversity were the main criteria to select the master papers. Each research supervisor of the five institutions was asked to select maximum five papers that were original and refreshing (compared to other papers of composition students) and at the same time displayed sufficient research qualities for the master level. The analysis of the dissertations and papers focused on:

- the global research design and nature of the research questions
- the research disciplines and practices on which the research is based and inspired
- the function of the artistic work and the own art production in the text

An *online questionnaire* provided additional background information for the analysis of these dissertations and theses. In January 2014 26 composers that were performing or supervising composition research (or had done this before this date) in one of the Flemish institutions, were asked to participate in the survey. Three composers gave a negative answer, 23 filled in the questionnaire but two participants did this insufficiently and only answered the first questions. The participants had 14 days to fill in the questionnaire which contained open questions without a predefined choice of answers. The length of the provided answers varied greatly: some contained only four words while others 250. A very small part of the answers was not useful because they were totally beside the question. The questions were divided in three groups:

1. questions for researchers/composers
2. questions for supervisors of PhD research in composition
3. questions for supervisors of research on a master level

The participants only filled in the questions corresponding to their own function. For example, a composer collaborating in a research project but not supervising master or postmaster research, did not have to answer questions for group two or three. The main goal of the survey was to obtain a global view on research in com-

position in Flanders. After an initial question on inspiring examples for artistic research in composition, each group contained questions on:

- the design and approach in the research projects
- the main problems and successes
- the goal of the research

The questionnaire answers were analyzed comparatively per composer and cross-sectional per theme (to detect similarities and differences between the participants). In general the content of the answers in the questionnaire is very diverse and idiosyncratic, which obscures the detection of common themes and problems. Nevertheless two themes – (score) analysis and reflection – appeared in the answers of several composers across the different institutions and therefore surpass the local and individual level. In the present article these two themes from the online survey are discussed together with the analysis of the papers and dissertations. The latter constitutes the main part of the study and the results of the online survey are used as additional information to verify and elaborate these findings.

The number of studied dissertations and papers, the varying quality of the responses in the online questionnaire and the lack of extensive interviews, point at the exploratory nature of this study which mainly aims to reflect on the future development of artistic research (in composition in Flanders), starting from an evidence-based overview and analysis. As such, this study is to be situated in between purely personal reflections (Croft 2015) and studies of a small number of research cases (such as Draper and Harrison 2011) on the one hand and extensive, systematic studies of the practice of artistic research (such as Hockey 2007, 2008) on the other.

Findings

Poor Dissemination

The first finding is not yet related to the content of the artistic research work. While collecting the data for this study, I noticed that the disclosure and dissemination of research outputs is not yet optimal. The information about produced master papers and PhD dissertations was dispersed. Moreover, in several cases it was not obvious to obtain a paper or digital copy. For example, emails had to be sent directly to the researchers, or, another example, the library of the institute where the dissertation was obtained, had to be physically visited. A number of obstacles and explanations for the poor disclosure were found:

- There are many library systems and databases in the Flemish institutions for higher music education, this is further complicated by additional databases in the universities with whom the music institutions have to cooperate (for post-master research). Some libraries only store paper versions.
- There are no uniform requirements for the artistic parts (scores, audio and video recordings) of the research outputs: for example some dissertations contain scores, others don't, and others only contain a selection of scores.

- Some editors object to make scores and recordings public.
- Some researchers object to spread their dissertation or score for artistic reasons; for example because a composition wasn't performed yet or the quality of a research output is not considered sufficient by the composer.

The next findings are closely related to each other and can be summarized as three gaps that exist between:

1. the text/research and the artistic practice in research projects
2. discourses on artistic and reflective research on the one hand and results of artistic researchers on the other
3. master and postmaster research

The Gap Between the Research-related and Artistic Part of Projects

In the online survey several composers underlined the importance of a close link between the research and the artistic practice. Some answers referred to this link as the main goal in their research project while others point at the difficulty to find and express this link. One composer stated: "The balancing of theory and practice is always a great challenge. Things might make perfect sense conceptually or theoretically but in practice something might go amiss. That challenge is about incorporating the research in effective and lucid way compositionally and evaluate the results in multiple ways." Although the composers-researchers stressed the importance of a close interaction between practice and research in their discourse and online survey, the influence from established disciplines (such as musicology, music history or music cognition) was very big in the dissertations and theses, Swerts (2011) being an exception. In the dissertations the research questions were mostly answered in the text part based on these established disciplines, and not in the parts about their artistic work. Moreover, the text part on the own practice contained information (for example about technology used in the compositional work or process) which did not directly relate to the main themes and questions of the doctoral research project. This text part was also relatively short compared to the text part based on musicology or music history, and did not offer new insights to the research findings⁵ Nevertheless, in the dissertation of Swerts (2011) a substantial written text on the own practice was found, while to a lesser degree sections on artistic practice in Maes (2013) also offered additional answers to research questions. Moreover, the nature of the research questions was more directed towards the established disciplines, for example by posing music-historical questions. Questions with a close connection to artistic practice were only prominently present in Swerts (2011), and to a lesser degree in Craenen (2011). In the other dissertations artistic questions and problems popped up temporarily (in the description of the own compositions) but they were not further elaborated.

In general the gap between the research and the artistic practice was wide in the five dissertations studied, with Swerts (2011) being the main exception and less extensive examples of interaction also found in two other cases (Craenen 2011; Maes 2013). The focus on the interaction between research and artistic practice

should not prevent us from seeing that some dissertations are valuable and innovative though. For example, Craenen (2011) prefers an essay-like, speculative ‘comprehension’ of the body theme in composition, by uniting elements from musicology, philosophy and music cognition.

In the master papers the gap wasn’t that wide: in general the items and problems are more closely related to artistic practice, especially in Baumers (2013), Clynes (2012), Galli (2013) and Wemel (2011). For example, in her master paper Clynes (2012) first designed a number of linguistic concepts about language and the notation of music. Next she gave a situated analysis of her own artistic practice and demonstrated how her theories were elaborated and adapted by encountering compositional problems, intentions and practical requirements. Moreover, in the master papers the text about the own practice was as extensive as the other parts and more diversity in design and methods was found.

The Gap Between Discourses and Research Practice

The next finding relates to the fields and communities of knowledge on which a researcher relies to shape his/her project. In general the outputs studied were built upon specific knowledge from established disciplines. Artistic and reflective research appeared to be clearly less influential and left no lasting mark on the papers and dissertations.

A simple, quantitative method to study the links with knowledge communities consists of counting the number of references to artistic research in the bibliography, in this case of the dissertations. Two main categories of references were counted manually: first, the online book list of SHARE was used as a reference point for literature on artistic research (“Artistic Research Bibliography - SHARE.” Accessed December 7, 2014) and second, articles and texts published by researchers-musicians (as part of an artistic or practice-based research project). Even if the references to both categories were summed, there were no more than five references to artistic research per dissertation, although all bibliographies of the dissertations consisted of at least 100 references.⁶

The fact that the content and argumentation did not - or only minimally - build upon the literature of artistic research is even more important than the previous quantitative analysis. This also applies to ‘reflective’ literature. Even though a reflection or examination of the own artistic practice was part of most outputs studied, references to the existing, extensive literature on reflective inquiry (Roels 2014b, 46-50), were almost totally absent in the papers and dissertations. This lack of links with artistic and reflective research implied that the researchers almost never situated their research approach within current discussions of artistic and reflective research. An exception was found in the master research of Baumers (2013), who departs from the research project Anonymous (De Baets et al. 2011) in which he participated a few years before writing his paper. The researchers did describe their design and method, often with a profound knowledge of specialized literature (happening more outspokenly on a postmaster level). For example, in the dissertation of Van Puymbroeck (2012) two compositions of Prokofiev were compared by incorporating an extensive list of musicological and historical lit-

erature on this composer. Thus, the outputs studied are not isolated islands, they create clear connections to the previously mentioned established disciplines. But to a high degree the researchers designed their research without drawing upon the experience of similar artistic researches that have tried to describe research problems and (own) artistic processes. Therefore it is not surprising that in the papers and dissertations the function of the artistic practice (in the research project) and the role of reflection were often expressed briefly, idiosyncratically and not elaborated (Craenen 2011, 10; Van Puymbroeck 2012, 136). Moreover, some forms of reflection, such as reflection through dialogue or sharing of experiences (Burnard and Hennessy 2006), are totally absent in the dissertations and papers studied.⁷

The little attention paid to reflective research and literature stands in opposition to the great value, attached to reflection, in the online questionnaire. In the answers concerning both master and doctoral research, the importance of reflection is clearly acknowledged by the community of artistic researchers and this is a major, first step. In response to the question about the goal of master research supervisors gave answers such as “(critical) self-development”, “reflecting, experimenting, again processing insights” and “deepening the artistic practice”. Three supervisors of doctoral research also mentioned reflection as being crucial. Asked for the goal of their own research, three composers again gave an answer that pointed at a deeper understanding of the own practice. For example, one composer described the goal of her research as “gaining more insight through research of your composition, more specifically of the composition process or the processes to make something.”

As a side note I want to underline that reflection and reflective inquiry are highly relevant for research in music composition, and for any research in which the ego is prominently present. In reports of such research projects a reader needs to find evidence that the researcher is fully aware of writing about him/herself and the consequences this has for the design, method and style of the research.⁸ Reflection is a multifaceted term, it embraces the (epistemological) notion of reflexivity, which has been widely debated in qualitative research over the last decades. Reflection in the sense of reflexivity means that a researcher has to be aware of the methods, sensitizing concepts in the research and the interaction between the researcher and the researched (Snape and Spencer 2003, 13-14). Therefore in recent qualitative research a researcher cannot take a neutral position towards the studied object for granted and at least needs to add an argumentation on this position. Reflection gets an extra dimension if the researcher is both object and subject of the study (as in autobiographical research). Both roles often coincide in artistic research, specifically because the (artistic) products were made by the researcher. Because of its complexity and high relevance reflection needs to be built upon the knowledge and experiences from preceding researchers and not just left to generic and idiosyncratic solutions, which was mostly the case in the papers and dissertations studied.

The absence of profound relations with artistic and reflective research in the outputs studied on the one hand, and the expressed importance – mainly in the

online questionnaire – of reflection and a meaningful relation between research and artistic practice on the other, point at a gap that exists between the results of artistic research and the discourses on artistic and reflective research. An obvious explanation for this gap might be the timing of this study: artistic research in Flanders is still in a starting phase and therefore the number of artistic and reflective research projects and its literature, to which can be referred, is limited. But this explanation is not sufficient. On an international level (for example in the UK, Sweden or Australia) artistic research came into existence during the 1990s and reflective research (mainly outside the arts) even a decade earlier (Lyons 2009). The method and scale of the current study could not provide a definitive explanation for these gaps but according to me, there is not one single explanation and both sides of the spectrum may be involved, i.e. on the one hand the master and PhD students and their research environment (supervisors, colleagues, etc.) may not be informed enough about artistic/reflective research and its literature, and on the other hand the existing literature in artistic research (such as the “Artistic Research Bibliography” of SHARE (Accessed December 7, 2014)) may not be suitable or attractive enough for research in composition because it is too general, far-fetched or too much derived from other art and research disciplines. This points at a need to develop an ‘intermediate’ discourse on research in music composition that connects the existing – general – discourses to the practice of artistic research in composition.

The Gap Between Master and Doctoral Research

The analysis of the papers, dissertations and online questionnaire also points at a gap between master and doctoral research. No indications were found that outputs from one researcher at a master level are used by another at a doctoral level to design, elaborate or just inspire a research project. Master students performing composition research are also not involved in postmaster research. This finding, the gap between master and postmaster research, denies the important value that master research has for composition research at the postmaster level. First – as previously described – the master projects provide genuine attempts to create a meaningful interaction between the research and artistic part. Second, the master outputs display a wider variety of approaches and methods in artistic research compared to the PhD dissertations. The higher number of papers and/or the absence of a link with the universities can provide possible explanations for this diversity. For example, Wemel’s paper (2011) provides an example of community research (composing for and together with a specific social group) which is missing in the PhD dissertations. The approach of Baumers (2013) is also unique compared to the dissertations. Starting from the evolution in his thinking about composition, Baumers elaborates compositional concepts and problems appearing in four recent compositions.

This diversity in the master papers is an important contribution to composition research in Flanders because compared to international examples of artistic research (Biggs en Karlsson 2010; Wilson and van Ruiten 2013; Polifonia Research Working Group 2010) the diversity in Flanders is rather limited. Some artistic research approaches are lacking or at least are only there in embryonic form. For

example, a fragmentary but first attempt of an approach that aims to develop new practices or techniques – as in Research & Development –, is only found in the dissertation of Maes (2013, 316). In a (sub)chapter she describes her interactive work *Oorwonde*, positions this within similar artistic works and discusses the innovative aspects of her work. ‘Emergent’ research which takes the serendipity and dynamic character of the creative process into account, is almost absent in composition research in Flanders and only implicitly present in the previously mentioned master paper of Baumers (2013). Authors such as Borgdorff (2012, 80) have argued that artistic research is more ‘discovery-led’ than ‘hypothesis-led’, researchers need to shape their research through problems and insights emerging through artistic practice. Moreover, the tension between sticking to a main problem or hypothesis and the emergence of related and new problems in artistic practice was clearly visible in the outputs studied. As previously described, temporary topics, unrelated to the main questions, pop up in the written part about the own practice but they are kept short in contrast to the more extensive parts, which are based on an established knowledge field and the main research problems. In general more research diversity is necessary in Flanders and master research can make a significant contribution to this. It must be added though that the online questionnaire again offered a different viewpoint: according to the answers – made by a larger group of composers, being part of ongoing research – different approaches, such as experimental, emergent or R&D research – are also to be found in composition research in Flanders.

Proposals

What can we do to bridge the previous three gaps? How can we ensure that more experimental approaches, which were only found in the questionnaire answers, produce outputs which reflect this (intended) interaction of research and practice? How can we raise the impact of a researcher’s work and make sure that knowledge, obtained through practice, is articulated “in forms with which others can engage?” (Newbury 2011:372) To answer these questions I make three proposals that are partly based on practices, examples and suggestions discovered in the current study.

Improving the Accessibility and Disclosure of Research Outputs

It is obvious that the disclosure and dissemination of research outputs needs to improve. Not surprisingly the first proposal is a very basic and straightforward one: the results of research in music composition need to become more accessible. This is a *conditio sine qua non* if we want to improve the impact of research and have researchers read and listen to each other’s productions. Also, minimum requirements and control mechanisms need to be set up by institutions to ensure that the research outputs contain all the artistic productions of this research and end up in libraries. Moreover, greater attention for the communicative issues and design of the research productions corresponds to recent calls in literature to stress the exposition and exhibition of artistic research work as an essential part of the research process itself (Schwab en Borgdorff 2014).¹⁰

On an inter-institutional level a selection and dissemination procedure could be set up to select the most valuable outputs of the *master* research. A selection is necessary because this study made clear that a part of the master papers (three out of eleven) do not provide an added value for research in composition in general. Important parts (such as the design or method) were missing in these papers and a dialogue with research texts therefore seems highly problematic. Together with the PhD dissertations the master papers create a larger corpus of research outputs which helps future researchers to evaluate the research designs, consciously choose their own approach and foresee problems. Newbury (2011, 374) notes in a discussion of the competences and skills, central to training of researchers in the creative arts: “There is clearly a high degree of interdependence between the skills involved in conceptualizing one’s own research project and those involved in critically evaluating prior research.” In the collection of papers and dissertations studied three groups of related research approaches (‘clusters’) were found. First, there was a theoretic approach, in which new composition concepts are conceived and elaborated, this approach was present in Craenen (2011) and Clynes (2012). In a second approach own compositions are based on insights from the analysis of historic compositions. Swerts (2011) and Galli (2013) are examples of this ‘analytic’ approach. These first two approaches have the potential to develop into examples of ‘good practices’ on which future researchers can build because the only two examples of inspiring composition research, given more than once in response to a question in the questionnaire, were Craenen (first cluster) and Swerts (second cluster).

Finally, there is a third approach, a ‘non-western’ one, in which ethnic music is studied and compositions are made inspired by non-western music.¹¹ But this approach faces big challenges as these researches did not manage to transcend the trivial while expressing the links between their research and artistic practice, mainly by describing non-western instruments, scales or rhythms as part of their compositions. The larger collection of master and postmaster outputs helps to spot challenges of specific research approaches. Finding artistically relevant research questions and situating them within the current music practice seem to be urgent, specifically in this ‘non-western’ approach.

An Explicit Approach in Dialogue with Artistic Researches and Practices

My second proposal addresses the previously described gap between what is said about artistic research in composition and what actually is done on the research floor. What individual researchers need to do is develop a more elaborate discourse on the overall design of the own research project in a dialogue with other texts.¹² The parts of the dissertations and papers which deal with a specialized topic could be shortened in favour of a well argued location of the research project within a diverse and rich tradition of reflective and artistic research and practice. A way to realize this consists of expressing your position as an artistic researcher towards existing, strong knowledge domains in music composition. In this study two such strong knowledge domains were detected: (score) analysis and the (re-)search) history of composition.

This ‘research history’, pre-dating the official launch of ‘artistic research’, consists of a large and diverse collection of texts, compositions and practices by composers, documented by various people and researchers.¹³ Examples are the ‘recherche musicale’ at the GRM institute in France in the second half of the 20th century or a book such as ‘New Musical Resources’ of Henry Cowell. As noticed in the online questionnaire – and also in meetings and concerts of composers – researchers often refer to parts of this vibrant tradition. I believe that this research history of composition can have a bridge function to connect more general discourses on artistic research with the actual research processes in composition. Anno 2015 the first moves in this direction can be observed. For example, the composer-researcher William Brooks (2014) describes how the poet William Butler Yeats searched for a new form of ‘chanting’ (reciting) during a period of several years. The Irish writer collaborated with actors and even an instrument builder to achieve this; next he wrote down his insights and experiences in a number of essays. Two other composers-researchers, Daan Janssens and Juan Parra Cancino,¹⁴ explained their relation to the research history in composition on a seminar in 2014.¹⁵ The works of Gérard Grisey (1946-1998) were an important inspiration source for the research project of Janssens because this French composer problematized a number of compositional procedures and offered possible solutions in separate compositions and essays that he produced. These examples show how insights gained from the literature on artistic research help to re-interpret historical research practices. The greater distance in time and location eases the recognition of strengths and weaknesses in these historical practices after which the gained insights can be applied in the ongoing research in composition. Consequently a fertile mix of recent discourses on artistic research and the rich tradition of domain specific research practices in composition is created.

The second strong knowledge domain is analysis and it can also form a bridge between discourses on artistic research and the actual research practice. The term analysis stands for the discipline that examines the product (score or audio recording) of the composition practice. Especially score analysis has a long and strong tradition in the music conservatories. Analysis appears in the dissertations studied (Craenen 2011; Swerts 2011; Van Puymbroeck 2012) and master papers (Costa 2013; Desimpelaere 2014; Galli 2013; Wemel 2011). In the online questionnaire, which was characterized by a wide variety of answers, analysis is repeatedly mentioned by six composers in response to different questions. Both in the research practice and the discourses on this practice, analysis still plays an important role in Flanders. Although analysis mainly appears in its traditional form (analysis of themes, pitch scales, structure, etc.), there are also instances where new forms or goals appear. These innovative instances have the potential to bridge the aforementioned gap. Craenen (2011), for example, develops concepts on the role of the performing body and introduces his point-line model. Next he elaborates and refines it by analysing Berio’s *Sequenza V*. The analysis has a double function: first, it is a detailed application and elaboration of his concepts on artistic practice and second, it underlines the relevance of self-designed, individual composition concepts for other composers and their artistic work.

Analysis appears in other new forms (with new goals) in this study. In the questionnaire one composer who has supervised many master composition students, explains how analysis can contribute to a new relation between the composer and his own work. In the papers and dissertations this ‘reflective’ analysis also re-appears, own scores of composer-researchers are analysed to obtain new insights on the inspirational sources, the relation with other composers or on what he/she is doing while composing. But this new form of analysis is often only present in an implicit way and the consequences for the whole research method and design are not fully recognized. To develop the discourses on artistic research in music composition, as a bridge between research practice and general artistic research discourses, these new forms of analysis need to be articulated and elaborated. For example, the reflective analysis appeared in the paper of Polak (2013) in which the following research question turns up: “How does inspiration shape my own compositions?” But his method closely resembles traditional score analysis, in which motives and scales are analyzed. The goal is new but the method is conventional. At this point the lack of knowledge of reflective literature hinders the researcher from elaborating this new form of analysis and asking challenging questions about the role of ‘reflective’ analysis, such as:

- How can an analysis of the composition product enhance the self-learning capacity of the composer?
- What determines the choice of parameters in this analysis?
- Is a ‘reflective’ analysis of the end product possible without an analysis of the creative process, preceding the end product?¹⁶

To summarize my second proposal, on the one hand it is not the specialized knowledge in a research project that needs to be further developed. Currently the expression of an explicit research design, in dialogue with existing literature, is more urgent for composition researchers as this can create a link with discourses on artistic research and help to give research in composition its own identity. On the other hand, researchers can develop this explicit position by (partly) interacting with the strong, existing knowledge fields such as analysis and the (unofficial) research history in composition. This will ensure that researchers and composers ‘in the field’ can intellectually and emotionally connect with these new research stories.

An Environment for Research in Music Composition

Harrison (2014, 201) describes one of the three themes for the future of research in higher music education as “finding ways in which the individual and community space can co-exist.” My third proposition is a call to create a real research *environment* for music composition research and to rely less on an individual approach. Too much attention for the ‘individual space’ (in Flemish institutions) risks ending up in either idiosyncratic, isolated research with minimal links to artistic research (as observed in this study) or the absorption into university environments in which the established disciplines have a strong position. An artistic research environment for composition means that experiences and practices are shared and

discussed between researchers and artists. On the one hand this network should support and stimulate a researcher in experimenting and deviating from known research designs and methods, to avoid running into the same gap between research and artistic practice. On the other hand, the interaction with other artistic researchers in such an environment should also challenge a researcher to develop a well argued and elaborate stance on the fundamental concepts and methods in his/her project, something which is currently lacking.

Conclusion

In this study the first collection of outputs from Flemish artistic research in composition between 2009 and 2014 was examined. The established disciplines such as music history, cognition or philosophy, clearly left their mark on the research projects studied. More specifically, in the doctoral dissertations, the link between the research/text part and the own artistic practice was not substantial: research questions were not directly related to the artistic practice and the main part of these questions were not answered in relation to the own artistic work but in the text parts based on these established disciplines. The observation of Lützw-Holm (2013), that the methods in artistic research in music, display a clear influence from the human social sciences and lack experimental activities in which knowledge in and through practice is developed, is applicable to the dissertations studied.

This study, more specifically the online questionnaire, also detected that many researchers and supervisors are fully aware of the importance of reflection and the search for a meaningful link between artistic practice and research. But the results of research projects, the dissertations and master papers, built very little, if at all, on other texts from artistic or reflective research. At best, some methods and approaches were personally well-founded but in general, a dialogue and link with artistic and reflective literature were missing and a developing discipline with an active exchange of knowledge among researchers, was not found. In this article I have made proposals to develop meaningful and workable relations between the individual research projects. I suggest to focus more on a shared environment for composition research, expressing an explicit design and method, positioned within a field of related artistic research/practice and less on obtaining very specialized knowledge. To reach the actual research 'floor' of composition researchers, the search for an explicit design could connect with two strong knowledge domains, (score) analysis and the (research) history of composition. In the different sources of this study these two domains left multiple traces. But the links between these traces – and the two knowledge domains – on the one hand and the position of a researcher on the other, need to be further questioned and elaborated. Consequently, analysis and composition history can be given a role in the development of a specific discourse on artistic research in composition.

Finally, I propose to improve the accessibility and dissemination of research outputs and to involve a selection of master papers in these dissemination projects. Because of the genuine attention for the integration of the own artistic practice and its wider variety of approaches, master research proved to be valuable for the

further development of artistic research in composition. Hopefully the proposals in this article can raise the impact of individual research projects and foster the growth of artistic research in composition in Flanders into an active community of composers and researchers.

Endnotes

- 1 The present study is the result of a collaboration between the Orpheus Institute and the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (Artesis Plantijn University College) within the MAO meetings (Module Artistiek Onderzoek). Kevin Voets was the co-researcher of the current study.
- 2 Master papers is used as an overall term for the outputs of the research project at the end of the master studies.
- 3 The author was not able to obtain the text of the dissertation (in 2009) of Peter Swinnen.
- 4 Doctoral dissertations, that were produced by composition professors before artistic research officially came into existence, are not included as sources in this study. Examples are the dissertation of Jeroen D'hoë obtained in 2003 at the Julliard School, or Godfried-Willem Raes in 1993 at the University of Ghent. Two 'practice-based' dissertations (De Bièvre 2011; Einarsson 2012), obtained in the UK in the period before these composers were working in Flanders in 2014, were read as background information.
- 5 The varying presence (and absence) of the artistic productions (scores and recordings) in the research outputs studied and the equally varying length (or even absence) of text parts, explaining or discussing this artistic practice, makes it impossible to fully integrate and analyze the artistic productions in the current study.
- 6 Maes (2013) might be the only exception as this dissertation also contains references to texts, magazines and publications by artists themselves, produced before artistic or practice-based research officially existed. Only the – more recent – texts that were part of artistic or practice-based research projects were counted as references to artistic research.
- 7 I didn't find any traces of literature on action research or community research in the papers or dissertations studied, even though there are clear links in content between some of these outputs and these research disciplines. For example, in his master paper Wemel composed a song for a student organization and designs an interesting and very well thought-out research method through which he composed the song together with this stakeholder group. But he is unconscious of the fact that he is performing 'community music research' and many other researchers have preceded him. An extensive review of literature on community music research has been made for the AHRC: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/18931/3/Community_music_research_review.pdf
- 8 On the importance of reflection for artistic research see a.o. Gray and Malins (2004) and Griffiths (2010)
- 9 Recently, a database for research projects in higher music education has been established on an European level by AEC (Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen). See <http://www.aec-music.eu/about-aec/services/artistic-research-projects-database>.

- 10 The attention for dissemination and communication can also stimulate the development of multimedia research outputs as these were missing in the outputs examined in this study.
- 11 The sources within this group are: Cornelis (2013), Dias (2014) and Polak (2013).
- 12 A clear position, in which the own research design is contextualized within other artistic research projects, is missing in the doctoral dissertations studied. Expressing positions is an ongoing process and the first articles with a vision on artistic research in composition are found in literature such as Raes (2011), Roels (2014a), Vanhecke (2014) and Brooks (2015).
- 13 Examples of twentieth century theories in music composition are extensively documented in Donin and Feneyrou (2013)
- 14 Juan Parra Cancino defended his doctoral dissertation 'Multiple Paths: Towards a Performance Practice in Computer Music' in December 2014.
- 15 MAO seminar on historical examples of artistic research in composition, 12 November 2014 in the Orpheus Institute, Ghent, Belgium.
- 16 Personally I am convinced that a thorough and innovative analysis - on the individual level - is only possible if the analysis of the end product takes the intentions, problems and procedures while composing into account. Thus, a reflective method involves both the product and the creative process.

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