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The Art of Failure

Construction

Actualisation

Constraint

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Abstract

Failure is a subject of discussion in the arts regarding its role as a clear articulator of the creative process and the actualiser of live performance. Inspired by this discourse, this thesis examines failure in the arts to understand the processes of artmaking and art performance, by focussing on the role of failure in these processes. This is achieved through the analysis of four artist interviews elucidating three different modes of failure – acknowledgement, acknowledgement of possibility and culturally signified social resonance of failure – using the relevant art practices as the point of intersection. This is made possible by examining artistic research, including a number of models that describe failure in the making of art to demonstrate the reality of the first mode. A metaphor, the circus, is used to describe the acknowledged possibility of failure involving the audience in the performing arts, as in the second mode. To explain the third mode, the experience of failure on a personal level is traced through literature and artmaking to reveal its role in the practice of art. Failure is defined as a constructive, actualising and existential affordance for the understanding and analysis of art practice as predicated upon processes of trial and error. Through this argument, the functions of the three modes are explained and confirmed as, respectively, constructive, actualising and constraining. Finally, the liberation of failure from its cultural connotation as abject is argued to afford a more open use of the term and concept in the discursive approach to artmaking and performance as well as education, science and politics.

failure, productive/counterproductive failure, aesthetic rationality, art practice as research, experiencing, hermeneutics, culturally signified social resonance, politics of theatre, engagement, participation, constraint.

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Introduction: The Success of Failure

On the afternoon of 15 April 1984, the British ‘magician’ Tommy Cooper performed his tricks for a final time. As was his trademark, he failed in their execution, presentation and explanation. He was not ‘a failure’, however; he was simply tremendously successful at failure, having attracted a huge and loyal audience by performing regularly on television as a clowning magician specialising in failure (Fisher 2006, 145). Cooper’s talent was in the sharing of a performative sense of wonder with his audience by the way in which his failures successfully played tricks with his attention and intentions. In this manner he also avoided any attempt to evaluate or judge his performance as ‘only’ entertainment or art. Arguing for the latter was his constant play with expectation, interaction, instability and doubt in the articulation of his work, which was characterised by its clear and consequent thematisation of failure (Fisher 2006, 18-20). For this reason, I would argue that Cooper created a space for questioning success and failure in being and doing. That particular afternoon he succeeded at performing the ultimate failure, leaving his audience convinced of his continuation in performance for several minutes after dying of heart failure on stage. He left his fans, life and profession as a success at final failure. He is one of the inspirations for this thesis by disclosing the richness of its subject to me for the first time.

Running into Failure

During my internship in 2018–19 at ArtEZ school of the arts in Arnhem, I conducted a series of student interviews. The subject of these was the position of artistic research in the curriculum of the master of theatre practice in which the students took part at that time. During these interviews and further discussions, the concept ‘failure’ as being a constructive and motivating factor in artistic research and artmaking was repeatedly thematised by the students as being helpful in the description and discussion of choices in the process of making and performing art. We discussed its functioning as a catalyst in propelling their compositional work forward as well as in relation to the possibilities it unpacks in creating a bond with an audience. Moreover, we discussed its capacities to deconstruct the binary choice of failure or success, which plays an important role in an artist’s professional life and career. These discussions focussed my interest in and on failure, which was deepened further by subsequent encounters

with ideas related to failure in the literature on artmaking and performance. Here it was often presented as a constructive and sometimes productively deregulating concept. This prompted me to ask myself how failure in the arts can work so differently from failure in the sense of the general meaning of the term in Western culture. What specific questions would I need to ask to learn more about this? For a start: What could those different types of failure be?

Productive and Counterproductive Failure

Over the last decades the term 'failure' has been used more explicitly and provocatively in discourse and literature relating to several domains, notably of (self)education, to describe situations and processes where it is explained to stimulate positive change (Le Feuvre 2010, 12). To understand the pervasive use of the term 'failure' in a wider context, I introduce it here through the social/educational domain, where a multiplicity of (self)help and management literature 'embraces failure', often citing Samuel Beckett (Beckett 1983), as does the discourse on education, exemplified in titles such as *Fail Again, Fail Better: Embracing Failure as a Paradigm for Creative Learning in the Arts* (Smith, Henriksen 2016).

The suggestion of this title and the quote on which it is predicated is that failure should not be replaced by success, but changed into a better, possibly more productive, failure as in the format of creative learning. This suggests the existence of a productive category of failure next to a generally accepted counterproductive category. In recent discourse addressing failure in the performing arts, this latter category is discussed more and more frequently. To quote some examples from the last decade of writing in performance studies: Theatre scholar Sara Jane Bailes authored a book on performing arts introducing a 'poetics of failure' (Bailes 2011). Actor/director Jordan Tannahill's manifesto *Theatre of the Unimpressed* proposes an exciting 'theatre of failure', arguing for it as a chance to save theatre performance from tradition-bound 'staleness' and consequently losing its audience to the mediated perfection that nudges them towards a much more consumptive attitude which positions performance as entertainment (Tannahill 2015). Lisa Le Feuvre presented an anthology of contemporary artistic discourse and thought on failure in the eponymous *Failure*, which situates it in the performing arts (Le Feuvre 2010). The bi-monthly publication *Performance Research*

released a 2012 issue of essays titled *On Failure* (O’Gorman, Werry 2012). In resonance with the three authors/editors previously mentioned here, it presents failure as a dynamic approach towards a new aesthetics of participation and engagement between performers and the audience, by engaging the audience with the experience of an actualising liveness in the shared experiencing of the unexpected in performance.

This conceptualisation of failure as productive¹ in referring to the performing arts is developed by these writers in connection with a politics of theatre that, for many of those involved in this discourse represents a world they mean to create performatively, rather than representing the world as presented to us. In her presentation of a politics of failure, Bailes predicates her description of ‘the [theatrical] image’ on the work of Karl Marx. She refers to the Marxist operationalisation of this image as ‘the very means through which the world re-establishes itself, and material insofar as it can constitute the preconditions of a situation. If the dominance of bourgeois culture as producer and extension of capitalism is to change, then the establishment of other methods of production and imagining must precipitate that shift’ (Bailes 2010, 36). In her book, which I will refer to later, Bailes introduces a semiotics and semantics of failure as a tool for artful questioning and deconstruction of societal politics, applied to the construction of a politics in and for the arts.

Failure can be found in the literature and discourse on art and artmaking but also in the discourse on scientific method as using hermeneutical processes. In his book *Failure*, the American scientist Stuart Firestein describes failure as an important concept in articulating the description of smaller as well as larger processes of critique and progress that drive the development of science, technique and industry on different levels (Firestein 2015). Simplified, these are processes in which trial and error are used in a circular mode to systematically approach a satisfying outcome by way of interpretation of the results. Emphasising the importance of failure as a catalyst in these processes, Firestein argues for an understanding of success as a rare state of stability and the presence of failure as the natural dynamic of nature and research (Firestein 2015, 41).

¹ ‘Productive failure’ as used in this thesis should be discerned from the slightly similar concept developed by Manu Kapur (Kapur 2008) relating to failure as an educational concept in problem-solving.

In what I propose to call 'productive failure' here – referring to it as a category rather than as an educational method, as does Manu Kapur (Kapur 2008) – performance and hermeneutics have introduced two different realisations of failure. They make use of the possibility of failure as an actualising element in performing arts and failure as constructive in iterative hermeneutical processes. As argued in the previously cited discourse on failure in the performing arts, it can be an awareness of contingency which vitalises and actualises live performance by introducing the possibility of doubt and of unknown possibilities. It is not unlike the process of engaging with the audience that can be observed in Tommy Cooper's shows. In hermeneutic processes, however, failure is not the end. It belongs to the constructive quality of such productive failure that it functions rather as a start, or, more importantly, as a continuation of a process of doing research, taking part in education or making art.

Yet again a different kind of failure addresses the signification of the cultural resonance of failure (Allen 2015, Marston 2018). This is a failure of process and a resultant state I will define here as counterproductive. It is the one which in private or professional life can inspire the reading of books with titles such as '*From Failure to Success: Everyday Habits and Exercises to Build Mental Resilience and Turn Failures Into Successes*', which by its explanatory subtitle 'reveals what failure really is and how to deal with it in a constructive way that will help you achieve success'. So, according to the subtitle, failure supposedly leads to success as an intended outcome, provided the follower has built 'mental resilience'. One can fail, but as a subject, one need not become signified as 'a failure'. For this, mental resilience is needed, to bring changes in life by altering everyday habits: reversing the failure by learning to apply coping tactics and strategies.

The previously described productive modes of failure, affording actualisation and construction, seem to be different from a 'counterproductive failure', as implied in the example of 'pass/fail' at a ticket control, allowing the subject to enter (or not enter) a space or activity. Failing to enter as a result of 'failing to pass' does not present a failure that can be reversed by being embraced. It creates a state of exclusion of the subject from the world beyond the gate. Repetitive affirmation of this status may turn a subject into 'a failure', a counterproductive state or status that psychologist John Shotter describes as the experience of having one's societal membership 'on probation' by

one's sensitivity to failure and of this sensitivity functioning as a vulnerability corroding self-confidence (Shotter 1993, 194).

Social anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu supports this argument of failure being a dynamic behind exclusion through loss of status in his description of academic 'habitus', which situates this 'mode' of failure in the social domain (Bourdieu 2013, 147). The production of art, as well as the discourse on art, also exists within the social domain. This leads to a consequent revisiting of these arguments later in this writing: The constraints this mode of failure proposes to art arguably go beyond the romanticised image of the suffering artist to whom it also refers. What the ticket control metaphor and Shotter's and Bourdieu's analyses do indicate, however, is a counterproductive, constraining effect of failure as a social and cultural phenomenon. Articulating this distinction is an important intention in writing this thesis: to demonstrate how the Western meaning of failure to which I referred works in the making and performance of art.

In summary, we can discern different types of productive and counterproductive failure. Next to being experienced as counterproductive in a social and cultural mode, we can also 'fail better', demonstrating resilience in engaging in a new attempt, arguably informed by the failure, arguably committing to a different outcome. Art may function as an ecology through which this difference can be better understood. This diversity of categories or modes of failure brings me to the central question of this thesis:

'How do productive and counterproductive failure work in the making and performance of art?'

Embracing Failure, a Note on Method

To answer this question, I categorise failure beyond the first division between productive and counterproductive failure. The literature on the subject as just described does point to a further categorisation of productive failure that appears relevant to the arts. Firstly, the descriptions of a 'failure-driven' hermeneutics as a possible dynamic in the processes of making and researching may well be applicable to creating processes in the arts. Secondly, the descriptions provided by artists and scholars of

performing arts seem to point to 'the possibility of failure' as a category of contingency which, when acknowledged, actualises the experience of performance by performers as well as by their audience. How do these categories relate to the categories of productivity, which I previously introduced? These new categories seem to be connected to the actual application of failure as a dynamic or to the availability of failure (possibility), whereas the first-mentioned categories seem to apply to failure as relating to the quality of processes: productive or counterproductive. Next to both categories of acknowledgement of failure as productive, I intend to research two parallel categories of counterproductive failure. Here I intend to determine whether they eliminate or constrain the processes of making and performing art by not allowing for a resolution of the challenge of failure. Those two categories are the unresolved acknowledged failure in the making of art and the unresolved acknowledged possibility of failure in the performance of art. Consequently, four questions must be posed to answer the main question. All four situate acknowledged failure in the context of making art in a productive or counterproductive mode of failure.

A) Productive failure:

- (1) How does productive failure work in art after acknowledgement of failure as fact?
- (2) How does productive failure work in art after acknowledgement of failure as possibility?

B) Counterproductive failure:

- (3) How does counterproductive failure work in art after acknowledgement of failure as fact?
- (4) How does counterproductive failure work in art after acknowledgement of failure as possibility?

My internship at ArtEZ directed me towards reflective art practices that will prove helpful to answer these questions: the discourse on 'artistic research' and the related

'(art) practice as research'. These practices allow for a discursive approach to failure because they depend on reflection and documentation in which the process of making and performing art is exposed, which I can refer to when structuring my research. For a comparable reason, I will also refer to the concept 'aesthetic rationality' as developed by Martin Seel, because this enables me to address the experiential content of art as the sharing of experience and understanding that productive failure helps to articulate. As I further argue in the first chapter, a combination of art and research would seem the point from which to begin my research into how failure works, or is put to work, in the making of art.

To analyse and understand the work of 'failure' within the making of art, I researched the use of the concept of failure by artistic researchers and reflective artists in their research and reflection, by and through art. This was done firstly by undertaking a literature research to address the discourse and theory that establish combinations of art and research as a starting point. Based on this input, I describe my expectations on the use of failure in several models of the process of artmaking. The theory also leads to a metaphor enabling me to describe how failure works in the performance of art. Secondly, I undertook empirical ethnographic research on a relatively small scale. By interviewing and analysing the resultant descriptions by artistic researchers and art practitioners concerning the role of the concept of failure in their work, I compared the expectations derived from theory with the statements of practitioners. The analysis is based on the application of the various modes and models and metaphors I prepared for this purpose.

Overview of the Thesis

In the first chapter I introduce the modes used to describe the role of failure in art. Subsequently, I describe them in terms of the sub-questions as being about the role of failure in the making and performance of art and the function of the artist in her practice. Acknowledgement of failure in artmaking is argued to move the process forward in the working of a first mode. The positioning and articulation of the acknowledged possibility of failure is regarded in the discourse on theatre performance in art as the predicate for a beginning of new participatory forms of theatre which connect performer and audience, actualising performance as experienced 'here and now', as described in the

context of a second mode. How various artists cope with the acknowledgement of the occurrence of counterproductive failure is analysed as emergent from the discussions is described in the context of a third mode, argued to be instrumental in answering the third and fourth sub-questions.

In the second chapter I introduce the work of philosopher Martin Seel to situate this thesis and its work in the artistic-theoretical discourse engaging with the mode of 'aesthetic rationality', which affords communication about aesthetic experience as understood and shared in language. Consequently, an overview is made of concepts relevant to the discourse in 'art practice as research' to address failure through the rational discourse on artmaking. This results in a definition of artmaking that uses (art) practice as research, (A)PaR, as its model. (A)PaR is positioned as an explicitly reflexive practice of artmaking, which affords a discursive approach and reflective access to the processes that constitute this praxis. Subsequently, hermeneutics is introduced as a circular process of interpretation on which much of the work in (A)PaR as an educationally oriented form of artmaking is predicated. This affords the making of models that open the research into the positioning and working of failure in artmaking.

The third chapter develops, describes and visualises a series of models that are intended to situate the first mode of failure in the hermeneutics of the processes of artmaking.

The fourth chapter addresses the realisation of the second mode of failure as productive in the context of live theatrical performance. It is argued to afford a politics of performance predicated on the acknowledged possibility of failure. The circus is chosen as a metaphor to illustrate failure in the performance of art.

The fifth chapter addresses the third mode of failure, defined as the signification of the cultural resonance of failure, as counterproductive and illustrated as emergent from artwork and practice itself. This is found to describe the work of this mode of failure as inhibiting and, paradoxically, as affording the imagining of the impossible as access to the virtual domain.

The sixth chapter uses these models, this metaphor and the previously rendered descriptions of practice as resonant with the cultural signification of failure in the analysis and interpretation of four interviews with artists. These analyses situate the various modes of failure implied in the work and practice of the interviewees.

The seventh chapter discusses the conclusions extracted and analysed from the data gathered in the interviews and the general discourse on artmaking and (A)PaR, to answer the questions posed in this introduction. Answers to the questions relating to the working of failure in its different modes are presented here in a final discussion of the information arising from the previous chapter. This discussion relates to the secondary research questions and to two diagrams describing the process of artmaking and the operationalisations of failure in making and performing art. The resultant understanding of 'constructive', 'actualising' and 'constraining' functions of the various modes of failure in different practices of artmaking is explained. Finally, the findings and the relevance of the research in this thesis are discussed.

1 Meanings of Failure

1.1 Introduction: Modes of Failure

Failure in artmaking is presented in this first chapter in three modes of operation. First the productive modes of acknowledgement of failure and acknowledgement of the possibility of failure to situate failure as a concept in the domain of artistic intention and production. These two modes are argued as relevant for understanding the processes of art production and performance, consequently, as related to the first and second sub-questions. Subsequently, to understand the counterproductive influence of failure, the third and fourth sub-questions are connected to a third mode, which is further situated in the discourse on society and culture. This clarifies the way in which it is based on the social signification of failure as an influence on the production of art by what I call its 'signified cultural resonance'.

1.2 Failure: Present, Future, Past. Categories of Fact, Possibility and Resonance of Failure

Failure in art can work in the domain of the possible, as productive and intended, where it arguably contributes to the processes of constructing artwork or actualising performance by liberating it from set or fixed expectations. It can also work in the domain of the abject, as counterproductive and unintended, by arguably causing artwork to be left unfinished or unmade or by constraining the possibilities of performance. It is in the first domain of the possible that we intend to situate the research into the first two (productive) modes, subsequently addressing failure through the domain of the abject and the impossible to research the (counterproductive) third mode and its relevance for the making and performance of art.

The first mode, the mode of acknowledgement of failure as a fact, is argued to be the most relevant in understanding the creative process of artwork. It works by acknowledging and addressing failure 'here and now'. The second mode, the mode of the acknowledgement of the possibility of failure, is argued to be meaningful in the

context of actualising live performance. It concerns failure that is argued to release the potential of the acknowledged possibility of failure in a possible future. Productive failure in those two modes creates a state of productive dissonance between artist and the work in artmaking, or as the acknowledged possibility of failure between artists and the audience in a performance. Counterproductive failure, on the other hand, can inhibit resolution in these same processes through uncertainty about the possible transference of the meaning of failure in the past into failure in the present or future. Describing this process as working through the resonance of failure by way of its individual and social signification, I ascribe it to a third mode in which it works to resolve its resonance. It is this working of failure as creating dissonance, which belongs to all three modes I mentioned, that is a characteristic of the dynamics of failure. As a result, it opens up these processes to interpretation and change.

1.3 Three Modes of Failure

To research the working and consequences of failure, I use the first two modes to describe the dynamics of processes of artmaking as expressing and fulfilling intention in artwork and the third mode to investigate the cultural, social and intra-personal dynamic of art-practice as constituting a domain that again proposes different thematisations and workings of failure. I intend to instrumentalise the categories I propose here as modes to research the differences in functioning of failure, the first mode situating failure in the perceived and acknowledged present and the second mode situating it as an acknowledged possibility in the future. The third mode is used to answer the third and fourth questions, as it works in the context of the functioning of artists in individual or collective practice by connecting both temporalities. The mode affords the understanding of the resonance of the concept of failure by asking how acknowledged failure in the past influences the expectation of the acknowledged possible (future) failure in the present. This influence operates through the artist, her practice and the culture in which they operate. Failure manifests itself in this last mode as an existential rather than as a constructive or destructive mode. Here, failure works as setting conditions for the making and performance of art.

The first mode is the one in which failure is operationalised to move the creative process towards a new iteration in the chosen domain of artmaking. It does so by

acknowledging failure as an event and by inviting reflective engagement with its specificities to inform a further finalisation. The second mode is argued to vitalise performance, connecting performers and audience. The third mode allows description of individual and social engagement with failure as a possibility. It also affords understanding of failure as a theme in practice of artmaking as well as in its result, as it is experienced in the connection between the artist and her life-world. The experience of 'being a failure' has personal and status-related consequences and can challenge an artist's resilience to a degree that this will influence her practice rather than merely a single work. Where the first two modes intend to uncover the working of failure in processes, the third mode addresses the existential dimension of failure. To research the working of these modal categories of failure, asking how, I first ask where in the processes of art they can be found. How are these three modes each situated in the discourse on art and failure as constructive or possibly disruptive elements in the processes and practices of artmaking?

1.4 Acknowledgement of Failure as a Fact

The event of failure itself must be acknowledged as a fact. In the first mode this is relevant for the process in which it occurs to engage with the dysfunction or crisis it causes. This engagement is instrumental in the integration of new information and the possibilities implied in the failure with which it is engaged. In the situation of a practice for making art objects, the roles of maker and performer, making process and performed work, coincide. The involvement of the audience in the exhibition of an art object consists of co-creating a situation that is open to failure and that subsequently allows the audience to navigate the work from a unique perspective of instability, reflection and choice. This experiencing of the work is the information taken from it.

In making such art that 'performs itself' in its presentation – as exhibited by engaging an audience on an individual basis, as with the reading of a book or the contemplation of a painting – the functioning of failure is different from the way it works in 'performing arts'. The process of artmaking is where failure and the question it articulates through reflection afford a newly informed iteration of process. The consequent reflection on the failure, and the system or process in which it has failed, will lead to the possible alteration of logic, goal or system to incorporate the information extracted from the

failure to change the iteration from the previous one. The famous quote taken from playwright Samuel Beckett, 'Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better' (Beckett 1983), acknowledges existential failure in a dramatic context. It also voices a call to tenacity regarding the consequences of iteration after acknowledgement of failure. It is in those iterative processes that failure can be found and understood through its address in the first mode.

1.5 Acknowledgement of the Possibility of Failure

In the second mode, relating to performing art, failure can arguably be instrumentalised also as a possibility that can sustain and vitalise a performance, emphasising the performance's position as a unique event. According to sculptor and art-writer Joel Fisher, the possibility of failure as a creatively destabilising characteristic of artistic processes has considerable relevance in the performing arts. He argues that it should be considered as contingent on the intention expressed in the process of making. In Fisher's words, 'The recognition of intention implies that, to some extent, an artist is accountable for his images or actions. The existence of intention provides an opportunity for failure, ground on which failure can grow. Where failure occurs, there is the frontier. It marks the edge of the acceptable or possible' (Le Feuvre 2010, 119). It is this intention which exposes the artistic process to the dynamic of failure as a possible occurrence. It is also this possibility of failure as contingent upon intention which traces a thin line that separates failure from success and which, in this way, creates a liminal space, a 'boundary fraught with possibilities' (Le Feuvre 2010, 119) between the two. The space between failure and success can become the artist's playground, vitalising the making as well as performance of artwork. It can do so to the extent of failure being thematised as intention and in the experience of the performers navigating failure paradoxically as the performance's achievement, or success.

Lisa Le Feuvre also approaches doubt and failure from their capacity to open up situations and processes to new views, assessments and possibilities: 'Failure becomes intrinsic to creating open systems and raising searching questions: Without the doubt that failure invites, any situation becomes closed and in danger of becoming dogmatic. Artmaking can be characterised as an activity where doubt lies in wait at every turn and where failing is not always unacceptable conduct' (Le Feuvre 2010, 17).

The possibility of failure as a part of the motivational structure for participation in games and for imaginative interaction with narrative content plays a role in creating participatory engagement of people in a wide range of activity that can be considered play (Caillois, Halperin 1955. 71).

In Chapter 2 I further argue a point of view parallel to this, operationalising 'play' and 'festival' as theorised by Hans-Georg Gadamer as an important aspect of the experience of artmaking as a process. This engagement also allows the artist to take the 'audience' position in perceiving and deciding the 'success or failure' of her work in any particular stage of its development, in this way also supporting that phase of the creative process. Failure as operating in the second mode, however, can be found primarily in situations of interaction and performances inviting doubt and participation.

1.6 The Cultural Resonance of Failure as Signified in Art: Becoming (a) Failure: the Abject

To situate failure in a third mode, addressing the signified cultural resonance of failure, I illustrate how the term 'failure' is compared negatively with a 'successful' fulfilment of an intention, internally or externally motivated. This comparison functions as proposing a more or less clear criterion for 'success or failure', a binary that has been strongly embedded in Western culture. Success and failure connect an agent with an event or action by its final outcome. Further opposition of these defining terms as a characteristic of the agent's perception of self, as in 'being a failure or a success', establishes a connection between lack or fulfilment and (self-)image and the social status of failing or succeeding. I argue how the restriction or extension of perspectives for future action emerge from internalising or projecting the image of 'being a failure' or 'being a success', in work as well as in self-presentation, as indicated in the previous chapter by Shotter and Bourdieu. The binary failure-success appears to propose a mode of constraint versus encouragement on the level of motivation and practical realisation of a project of making or performing art.

In the social and cultural domains in which art functions, signification of acknowledgement of counterproductive failure as fact or as possibility is generally connected with the notion of acknowledged failure experienced as abject. It is for this

reason that the third mode, of counterproductive failure in art, is argued primarily as a socially constituted concept emerging from the practice of art. This concept imposes constraints on the making and performance of art; for its relevance, it depends on the work it constrains or prevents. For this reason both counterproductive failure acknowledged as fact and counterproductive failure acknowledged as possibility are subsumed under a third mode. I propose to define this mode of failure as the signified social resonance of failure.

The personification of failure ([‘being’ a failure](#)) came into reported use relatively shortly (1837) before it became possible to be a success (1882). In Western culture any notion of failure that connects with this cultural signification is primarily recognised as abject: that which we throw from us, that which we do not want to do or be. The notion of failure in Western culture is an abject notion, in the sense that the abject is potentially difficult or even impossible to integrate into our perceived cultured reality (Bourdieu) and our sense of well-being (Shotter). Failure repels. The sense of an automatic dissociation with the notion itself and the ‘other’ it represents reveals the concept as laden with conscious and subconscious annotations that are connected with social acceptance. For an artist it will also be about the acceptance of work undertaken and consequently of the subject undertaking it, possibly even instead of the work itself.

There are arguably few professions – outside of religious and ethical vocations – where the overlap between being and doing is as strong as in the arts. According to author Ismael Kadare: ‘... we can think of the abject in less literal terms. Ideas, concepts, desires – all of these can become abject. The method of abjection then becomes one of expression; i.e., to express or communicate through gesture or spoken/written language those things that are taboo, or socially unacceptable, is to tear those abstract parts of your mind from the whole of yourself and place them separate from you, outside in the public sphere’ (Bataille 1996, 11). Through this construction of failure as culturally signified as abject, we also see the emergence of the third mode of failure, which engages with the resonance of failure as culturally signified and individually experienced. Consequently, the third mode of failure can be found in the manner in which individual artmaking and art practice are conducted and shaped by the artists engagement with failure as thematised in her possibilities and expectations.

1.7 Conclusion: Searching for Failure through Art and Research

In this chapter I have situated failure in its role in the artistic creative processes as well as in the domain of art presentation or performance. I have further introduced both categories of productive failure operationalised as modes: acknowledgement of failure and acknowledgement of the possibility of failure. Discussing the categories of counterproductive failure, I have pointed out their shared focus as experiential and suggested their combination in a third mode as signified by cultural resonance of failure.

Most arguments, examples and concepts used to describe and illustrate the previously presented categories of failure throughout this thesis have been retrieved from the work of writers either involved in 'reflective artmaking' or in theorising it from the point of view of a reflexive praxis. Consequently, the domain in which this thesis situates failure for its interrogation is that of artmaking, entered through the reflexive practice of writing. To further explore the modes of failure in and through art – and combinations of art and research as illustrated by the reflecting and writing practitioners previously cited – I address the making process and its procedural as well as produced content at the beginning of Chapter 2. In this next chapter, I refer to Martin Seel's concept of aesthetic rationality, which affords an understanding of the making and perception of art as connected actions, to position the experiencing of art, critical reflection and the different modes of failure in the process of creating and performing art.

2 Situating Art in Research

2.1 Introduction

To unpack the processes of artmaking in which I intend to situate the work of failure, I address them through the reflective practice of artmaking mentioned here as (A)PaR. Before applying the proposals on structures of the processes in artmaking this brings to my research, however, I first turn to the work of philosopher Martin Seel. Seel developed the concept of aesthetic rationality, a reflective mode which refers discursively to experiencing the creation as well as the perception of art and to the artwork as the artists 'experience made experienceable in order to be experienced'. It is intended to afford a discursive approach to the experiential dimension of art and is predicated on a differentiation between the reflective use of 'rationality'; understanding by way of rational reconstruction, as defined by Habermas, and of reason, operationalised here as a discursive activity which affords a critical approach to events, facts and processes related to aesthetic perception. In the domain of aesthetics, this rational reasoning proposes an active critical reflection on the information derived from its rationalisation.

2.2 Talking about Making and Experiencing Art

According to Seel, this mode of critical reflection belongs to the receptive experiencing of art as well as to its creation (Seel 1985, 33, 38). The concept itself finds a further embedding in the work of Jürgen Habermas, where action can be motivated by purposive rationality, as the subject chooses her individual goals and the means to reach these or, as a communicative action, to work through communicative rationality towards a shared understanding of, or opinion on, the matter at hand (Habermas 1985, 273). Making art combines those perspectives in the intentional purpose of the artist in creating a work of her own imagining that arguably is a mode of self-realisation. At the same time, there is the purpose of the artist to bring the work to a point where it can fulfil the invested communicative intention towards a shared experiencing of the work as an expression that thematises that experience and its sharing. Aesthetic rationality conceptualises the 'knowledge' belonging to the process of doing-undergoing that is constitutive to the becoming of the work of art as a platform for these shared intentions of making and interpretation that connect makers to perceivers (Seel 1985, 32, 33).

Here, reason as the discursive mode of rationality affords critical approaches of the work, both as a finished as well as an unfolding process.

2.2.1 *(Art) Practice as Research*

In the practice of art 'by itself', in the sense that there is no focus on documentation or an explanatory component as part of the production as a whole, the reflectivity that is part of the creative process is not necessarily made to speak through the work in a discursive mode. This dimension of reflectivity that is an essential part of most combinations of art and research can be made explicit, addressed and researched by means of interviews and discussions with the artmakers who can speak for the work and give a more complete account of the creative process. Moreover, it could be researched as part of the documentation that is connected to combinations of art and research.

Aesthetic rationality is available to the maker as a discursive mode during her engagement with the process of making art. The critical self-assessment that is part of this process will also, at different stages in the creative process, inform the maker about the failure or success of a work as fulfilling her intention thus far. The maker can reflect on alternatives to be attempted as part of the circular process of interpretative iteration that positions the failure as a specific fault or omission to be addressed and engaged with. This process of iteration as a dialogue between the maker's intention and the work as emerging from the creative process is described more extensively in the next chapter. This process of iteration is also characterised by failure as part of its articulation of knowledge related to the maker's intention, as well as related to emergent knowledge about the process. When referring to failure in artmaking, I also refer to the tacit and the embodied modes of knowledge that are implicit in all processes of artmaking as a technical skill or as expressed content and are essential to the production of 'art knowledge'. To open up these processes to a discursive approach, I must find art practices that fit this approach and that can be helpful in involving their processes of artmaking in the discourse of aesthetic rationality by reflection on, and documentation of, the work. 'Work' is intended here as meaning artwork as a product and as the process to produce it.

2.2.2 *Modes, Models, Metaphors and Experience*

These categories, operationalised here as modes, the processes they help to describe and the manner in which they operationalise failure have been argued to be best understood through aesthetic rationality informed by the practices of art and research. The models of artmaking practice that are a result of art and research are used in the next chapters to describe the properties of the resultant three categories of failure in artmaking, operationalised as modes, as, respectively, constructive, actualising and constraining.

To prepare the answers to the questions on the work of failure in art that structure this thesis, in this chapter I further introduce (art) practice as research, referred to here as (A)PaR, as the basis for a model for artmaking presented in Chapter 1 as the site in which the first mode of failure, 'acknowledgement of failure', operates. I do so in reference to its ontology, which situates it between research and the arts, and its epistemology, which affords the integration of situated cognitive, conceptual, non-conceptual, embodied and tacit knowledge expressed in input as well as in the creative process as in the final product. I refer to (A)PaR as a set of sub-disciplines to research the modes of knowledge production that belong to the creation, performance and understanding of art. Subsequently, I situate hermeneutics as a central concept in this research process, to argue for its circular structure of inquiry to be motivated by failure as a catalyst in the hermeneutical processes that are part of (A)PaR as well as artmaking 'by itself'. Based on this structure, I work towards a composite model of hermeneutic processes of artmaking. This model situates the mode of acknowledgement of failure in the creative practices that are presented in the interviews with artists and 'artistic researchers' that are at the core of Chapter 6.

To situate the second mode of failure in the art practice in which it operates, I introduce the metaphor of the circus as an instrument for this analysis and as an operational description of the second mode – 'acknowledgement of the possibility of failure' – in the performing arts to analyse information provided about these practices and how they situate failure. Subsequently, I intend to reflect on the way in which the experiential dimension of failure, understood through the third mode of failure, affords analysis and understanding of possibilities and constraints experienced through their signification of failure as setting conditions for the functioning of all of these practices.

2.2.3 *Artistic Research? Tracing the Discourse*

To position failure in the making of art, I choose to approach it through the domain of reflexive artmaking as it has been developed in combinations of art and research within art education in recent decades. To situate the making of art and ‘doing’ research in a shared domain of knowledge and experience, I first investigate the discourse on the interrelatedness encountered at the intersection of these concepts. The dimension in which their intersection is relevant in the context of this thesis is that of the experiential, as it is referred to in the arts, or empirical/experimental, as it is referred to in research. Both art and research are domains that propose an attitude of intending, trying out/experimenting, experiencing, interpretation and understanding. Research is generally subsumed under the categories of science, investigation and technique. None of these privileges art as a tool or an object for research. In the combination of art and research, however, artmaking is operationalised as a reflective process which intends to uncover knowledge and understanding and to produce a connected outcome in an object or a performance (Borgdorff 2012, 37). In this, the performative nature of the artmaking process also reveals the performative aspects of the research process. Scientific research arguably seeks to produce knowledge and understanding. It does so by reflection, research, interpretation and signification of data ‘created’ in its ‘performance’, as argued by nuclear physicist and philosopher Patrick Heelan in his work on the hermeneutics of science (Heelan 1983, 184-185).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I have chosen to address the combinations of art and research that belong to this discourse as (A)PaR. What, then, is the meaning of this ‘as’ that this ‘(art) practice’ proposes to ‘research’? As a recently defined and continuously developing sub-discipline of artmaking and art education, (A)PaR is a hybrid domain of art and research that refers and contributes to discourses concerning research, aesthetics, artmaking and education. The art practice that is ‘as’ research is still being defined, including its place in the process of research, where it can be the object of, as well as a tool for, research (Nelson 2013, 15, 24).

2.2.4 *(A)PaR and Method*

Research and the arts are usually connected through three modes. Research is either ‘on’ the arts, (as in art history), ‘for’ the arts (background research, researching

materials) or 'in' the arts. The purpose of research 'in' the arts is closest to a science-related merging of both concepts, art and research, as it intends 'to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes' (Borgdorff 2012, 53). This research combines a 'constructivist' and a hermeneutic perspective: Objects and events are constructed and understood in and through artworks and artistic actions. It refers to a presentational rather than a representational approach of the intention and the content of the work. By the capacity of art for acts of worldmaking, it creates affordances for (re)interpretation of our lifeworld. In this way 'the hermeneutic perspective assumes that artistic practices and artworks disclose the world to us [...] to offer us [those] new vistas, experiences and insights that affect our relationship with the world and with ourselves' (Borgdorff 2012, 72). In our resultant experiencing of the artwork – and, through it, of the world – we can empirically access a new perspective beyond art itself. In approaching art as research, we can also access a connected vocabulary and reflectivity from the domain of research which affords a further understanding of the processes of the making and the experiencing of art.

The artistic products themselves are operationalised as a means to (further) understand art practice as a reflexive project. In (A)PaR the researcher coincides with the artist: The reflexivity afforded by the approach of work (process and result) as research and data allows the artist involved the possibility to not only enter the artistic discourse as a maker, but also to join the reflexive cognitive discourse about the making itself (Hannula, Suoranta, Vardèn 2005, 23). In that manner (A)PaR can function as a tool for art education and as a reflexive connection between the experiential and empirical dimension of art as a creative process and art as experienced in perception by its maker as well as by its audience.

2.2.5 *Epistemology: What and How*

Although this thesis focusses predominantly more on the 'that-ness' of knowledge in art - rather than on the implications of its structure, character and differences – I need to ask: 'If art knowledge exists, what knowledge is art knowledge?' (A)PaR addresses the making of art as the production of various types of knowledge and understanding but also as a set of production techniques and skills belonging to the process. This

raises questions about the categories of knowledge involved and how they are articulated and situated in the artistic process. Furthermore, the discursive mode that belongs to artistic research needs to produce and disseminate experiential knowledge about the work. This knowledge is intended to be shared as experience in its experiencing, rather than 'only' conceptual and cognitive knowledge of it, otherwise: 'We get a reinterpretation, a description, an enactment, but not the thing itself, if for no other reason than, because by writing down or reading we are already changing our experience, moving into a new situation' (Hannula, Suoranta, Vardèn 2005, 27). In that sense the range of knowledge produced in (A)PaR arguably is extended, rather than transformed, in comparison to the 'traditional' empirical scientific research to which it remains connected in the basic frame of 'thinking-doing' as a description of research.

The process of artmaking involves a transformation of knowledge: The 'tacit' and embodied knowledge going into the process speaks in its actions and results, such as the capacity to ride a bicycle or to achieve a bodily understanding of another's ability to do so. Specific knowledge of the materiality of making can be understood as 'phronesis', which I propose to translate as 'the wisdom of crafting'. Nelson also argues 'we "do" knowledge, we don't just think it' (Nelson 2013, 66). In this approach the artist/researcher becomes the performer of knowledge in the artistic research process. It also situates the artist/researcher at the core of the work and the resulting and processed knowledge referred to just now as action ('do') as well as cognitive reflection ('think'). The reflection on the combination of these knowledges as different, yet belonging to the same discourse of art and its making, brings us back to the work of Martin Seel as resonating with this.

In *Die Kunst der Entzweiung* (1985), Seel works through the concept of aesthetic rationality, which is predicated on Habermas' search for connection between aesthetic experience and truth in a discourse that moves beyond aesthetic judgement as the product of a profession. Habermas proposes that 'art enters into a language game which is no longer that of aesthetic criticism, but belongs, rather, to everyday communicative practice' (Habermas 1984, 237). The ambition Habermas describes here refers to the possibility of aesthetics being situated outside of an expert culture to be accessible from the lifeworld as an open domain. Consequently, Seel intends to define the skill of sharing a communicative understanding of the content of experience,

such as the experiencing I refer to as part of art knowledge as founded in the experiential rather than the cognitive domain. Through application of this, the domain of aesthetic experience can be made accessible through description, symbol and metaphor by way of a discursive approach in which the merging of experiential horizons between interpreters as well as between interpreter and the subject of interpretation is intended. In arguing this, Seel refers to the definition of communicative action by Habermas as social behaviour that is intentionally structured towards the achievement of a shared or common experiencing of the work, as well as an understanding of its cognition in the unpacking of experienced action towards a 'reasoned' discursive treatment (Habermas' 'Rationalität') (Seel 1985, 38).

Aesthetic rationality as a discursive skill set is intended to afford commensurability in its operationalisation between the situatedness of the maker and that of the perceiver, with the difference that the maker of the artwork must be able to argue both positions to afford an intended shared experiencing that focalises the work as 'speaking' from its perspective to both positions (Seel 1985, 33). In this situation it arguably occupies a place in the art process next to 'phronesis', the practical wisdom that makes the work available for 'both parties' in a material sense. Aesthetic rationality can be an affordance for a discursive communicative relationship between the maker and the perceiver, on which a shared rational address to the experiential knowledge contained in the work can be predicated. This 'aesthetic rationality' can be seen as occupying a complementary place in the process of experiencing the making and perception of the artwork, focussing on the 'that' rather than the 'how' of the knowledge, which is, in this way, being made available for discourse on the experiential dimension of the perception of art. The interpretation and understanding that ground this discourse are predicated on a circular process that structures the making as well as the perception of the artwork. This is the process where I will situate the first mode of failure; that of the acknowledgement of its occurrence: the process of hermeneutics.

2.3 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has been mentioned in this text as an iterative process of making and research, which I also descriptively referred to as an informed and relevantly structured format of 'trial and error'. In creating art and in applying hermeneutics in research, this

radically reduced 'formula' will not define all of the process. Existing generic or individual protocols of iteration are, most importantly, concerned with informing this iteration (trial and retrial) and the whole of the process of ways of moving towards an ending: closure. Examples of this are provided in the descriptions in Chapter 6. In its originary historical functionality of creating understanding of textual phenomena through interpretation, hermeneutics allows access to a diversity of 'texts', which may present themselves in many ways of knowing and understanding. Hermeneutics includes the domains of cognitive, non-cognitive, embodied, tacit and explicit knowledge in a process that enables the researcher to reflect on these qualities (Hannula, Suoranta, Vardèn 2005, 22). Consequently, the research process itself can be thought to include hermeneutic interaction as a space that enables interpretation and the translation or transformation between different epistemological modes. Arguably, even cognitive answers to non-cognitive questions and vice versa can be researched (Nelson 2013, 18, 53).

2.3.1 Understanding and Interpretation

How does the hermeneutical process afford the making of art? According to Robin Nelson, who refers to it as the prevalent 'method' of interpretation in making art and performing artistic research 'Hermeneutic-interpretative models are not linear but figured as circles, spirals or networks with many points of entry. Hermeneutic models function better with structural, material, sometimes chaotic diversity of approaches belonging to artmaking. [They] yield insights but there is an awareness that those insights are situated: Depending on where you enter, or pause to reflect upon findings, the insights will differ' (Nelson 2013, 18,19). Nelson configures hermeneutics as an intentional approach to making art, where it exists in experiencing and interpretation of steps taken in the making process, followed by integration and assessment of the result of those steps by comparison with an original or preceding intention. Depending on the outcome of this comparison, it may lead to an iteration of the process of conducting research or making art until the tension between intention and result, parts and whole, or between not knowing and knowing is resolved, translated and acknowledged as new knowledge presented in the work. Through the emphasis on entrance points and the situatedness of all that is acknowledged in the process, the hermeneutical process is proposed by Nelson to function as an imaginative dialectical

space that affords the joint articulation of experience through art by way of various modes of knowledge of intention, process and product in artmaking.

2.3.2 *Playful Hermeneutics, an Art Game?*

To position failure in the hermeneutic process of artmaking, I wish to refer here to Hans-Georg Gadamer's signification of the concept of 'play', which he abstracts as a mode of being and doing related to a non-purposeful, non-finite activity (Gadamer 2004, 104). I argue that it can be used to illustrate a specificity of hermeneutics as an organisational principle in artmaking, by acknowledging by metaphor several of the properties of artmaking as different from other purposeful applications. For this reason I propose to source the concept of hermeneutics in artmaking from Gadamer's concept of play. This introduces the possibility of the metaphor of the game, itself proposing and presenting the potentially endless 'to and fro' of play, which Gadamer describes as play's ontological dynamic. Play, or '*Spiel*', is etymologically related to 'dance' or 'making music'² in several languages as the basis of an endless possibility of games (or dances, in the metaphoric sense suggested by the etymological pairing) involving repetition, variation and difference. Play has no structure, objects and subjects until it is made a game by application of rules and intentions. Such a 'game' can be found in the making and subsequent participatory perception of art, which, in parallel to play, finds its purpose in the action itself (Gadamer 2004, 103). In the application of rules of articulation, such as continuation, failure (suggesting reiteration) and closure, the concept of play is operationalised as a functional approach to artmaking and perception. From the point of view of the comparison of its rules and articulations, artmaking 'as a game' is not specific in its purpose. The object of artmaking itself is creating artwork as an affordance that can make the original experience of the maker accessible, interpretable and open to experiencing on an intersubjective level. It provides an essential rule in a game that conceptualises the making of art as play. The art game takes its work into the domain of the festive, where it creates its own *Eigenzeit*, its self-positioning as a space where it can structure and articulate its own becoming and passing. It is in this context of artmaking seen as an experiential game of sharing experiences that we encounter failure as bringing in its constructive dynamic

² 'Playing' and 'making music' are synonymous in many languages, such as English, French, German and Dutch.

of articulating questions and proposing answers referring to “what” and “how” in the hermeneutics of making art, as Gadamer describes in *Die Aktualität des Schönen. Kunst als Spiel, Symbol und Fest*, (Gadamer 1993, 93-142).

2.3.3 Failure as Articulation and Indication in Hermeneutics

Expressed in terms of the articulation of the process of making, a failure is the cause of postponement of the intended closure of an action, process or event. It also points at a failing in referring to an omission; that which fails the whole which it could render complete by being inserted/repared/replaced. If the failure is part of a hermeneutic process, iteration is preceded by reflection on the failing that has revealed itself through the failure. Consequently, failure here has the function of exposing the failing, so that it can be identified and addressed in a new iteration of the work in which closure will be reached or in which failure again will expose something about the work which fails the expectation created from its intention. This process, possibly existing in a number of iterations, is closed off either by ‘success’, a stable state of ‘completeness’, or by ‘giving up’, abandoning a work or venue of research or making if the failure cannot be resolved into an iteration. A productive success can open itself up to a consequent practice of making by yielding an excess of failure in the form of ‘unanswered questions’ not relevant to the specifics of this artwork and also producing insights into the domain of realisation, which it has extended by its successful closure of the finished making process into an (art) product. This can result in the succession of the (art)work into a more enduring form of art practice, addressing these failings and insights as they may be sourced from an intersection of various materiality, disciplines, skills and individual points of view and intentions. The purposeful bracketing of art in the line before last intends to emphasise the similarities between research as a generic concept and as a description of artmaking. Consequently, operationalisation of the concept of play as referenced from Gadamer helps to define the specifics of art and artmaking as a further demarcation of the domain: It is in this context of artmaking as a communicative action which is driven by self-defined purpose and intention that we will look for failure to be productive because it is playful and playful because it is productive. It is also this definition of playful productivity on which I will predicate the definition of counterproductive failure in art.

3 Acknowledging Failure: Situating Productive Failure in the First Mode

3.1. Introduction

As intended in the previous chapter, the search to situate and understand the working of acknowledged failure in artmaking takes place in the domain of art practice as it is made researchable by the practitioner's reflection and documentation in (A)PaR. To situate failure in an art practice to research its functioning, in this chapter I define the practice as domain and its dynamics, first by description, then by way of a combination of triadic models of the hermeneutic process of artmaking that also form the basis for an analysis of the case interviews in Chapter 6.

3.2 A Hermeneutic Model for Making Art

The part played by imagination and reflection to realise and 'put' the intention implied in a making process 'into practice' is specific to the practice of art, just as other areas of practice – such as science, skills and crafts – create their own areas of functioning and of positing validations of methods and results. In the domain of art practice itself, 'A group of skills gives shape to a particular practice. Around these core skills, a loose set of other skills, beliefs and thematisations form a circle, an identifiable ontological region' (Hannula, Suoranta, Vadén 2014, 102). Underlying and combining these skills and understandings of artmaking is a practice 'framed through hermeneutics' (Nelson 2013, 59) which, as an iterative method of interpretation, underlies the discipline-specific qualities of practical performance of skill as 'phronesis' – the application of practical reason which affords the materialisation of the work in the stage of material production. For this reason, I now turn to hermeneutics as the underlying structure for art practice in which to situate information about the work of failure in artmaking.

To research the working of failure in practices of artmaking, a model of art practice and models of its sub-practices are needed to situate failure in its making processes. The intention is to reduce these elements of art and research to a model of hermeneutics as encountered in art practice. First, I consider the conditions it should meet:

- The model should describe the production of art in art practice as a hermeneutic process.
- The model should include (or afford inclusion of) and situate sub-practices of exploration, reflection and making, and afford description of their relationship and interaction.
- Each sub-practice is described as a process which has a proposed entrance and an exit point for feeding the information it processes into the next sub-practice in case of success, or back to a previous one in case of failure, to move on to a next node.

Once those stages can be presented in a model, it will be possible to further specify and formulate the following questions that are to be considered in the next chapter for the answers or results to be analysed in the fourth and last chapter.

How can the different modes of failure be positioned in this framework?

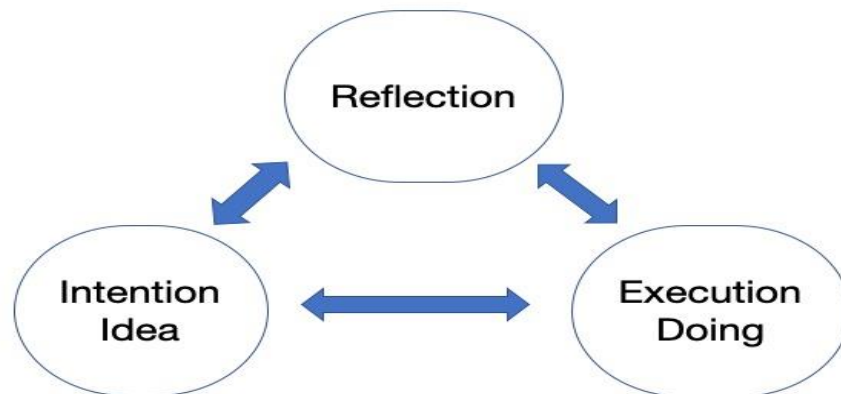
- How can these processes and their dynamic be presented in the context of their intended questioning in the next chapter's research?

3.2.1 A Generic Overview of (Art) Practice

To meet the previously mentioned conditions and to make the model sufficiently flexible so that it can be applied to various sub-practices, it consists of a series of triads that are introduced separately and subsequently applied to construct a generic model of art practice that can be operationalised to address the specifics of the cases of practice presented in the sixth chapter. Subsequently, in the seventh chapter, the information derived from this is combined into an overarching model in which failure is situated and where the dynamic of failure within the making process can be described. The models do not represent an intention to describe all possible practices of artmaking; flexibility and a general applicability have been the starting points for their creation.

The first triad can be seen in Figure 1 as a simplified representation of a diversity of practices, defined by chosen materiality, discipline, entrance point in the process, et

cetera. However, as argued in the previous pages, the hermeneutics of an art practice predominantly will exist in iterating a questioning interpretation involving the nodes of:



Artmaking as hermeneutics Figure 1

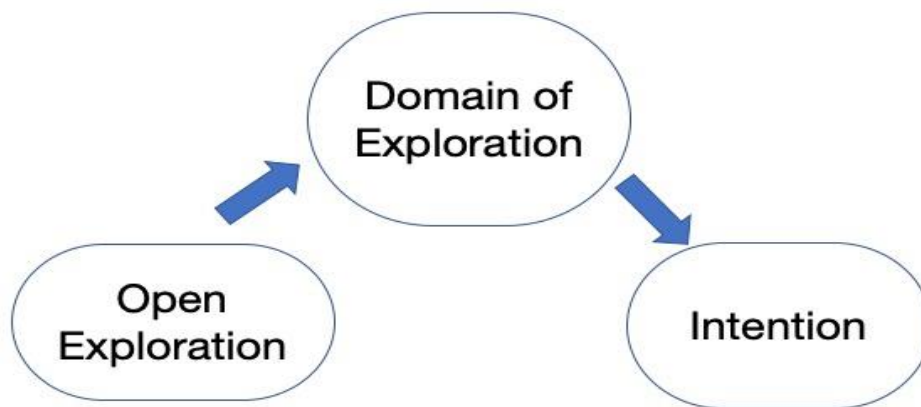
Here, the elements are in no specific order of temporal and/or causal logic: All three elements can interact with and feed into each other. Intention would seem to be the activating node, whether derived from exploration or practice or arrived at by reflection. The inter-relational dynamic is disclosed using the following model, which helps to situate the articulation of iteration or closure into continuation or finalisation in a next or previous stage or sub-practice. To reflect on how the elements and parts of art practice work together, I examine the practice of making as represented in the diagrams as being a process in separate stages, each diagram presenting one of those stages. Additionally, I examine the processes and stages as presenting and answering the questions 'what', 'why' and 'how'.³ The first diagram presents them in this order: the idea representing the what-ness of the process, the reflection addressing the question why and the doing concerning itself with how the work is made. There are more possibilities for the order of engaging with those questions, depending on chosen starting or ending points. The givenness of an intention as a starting point, for instance, as continuation or as an extension of a previous making process, might make a search for a new domain and/or an intention unnecessary.

The first diagram of a sub-process (Figure 2a) consists of a frame created to conduct research for the work, preceding the reflection and the making. It begins with free

³ **Why** those questions? **How** do they disclose **what** understanding of process? As with the previous sentence, they seem to present a minimum of questions resulting in description of motivation, method and matter. As an example, not proof: Michel Foucault returns to them continuously in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1972, 30, 32, 47,105,132) without explicitly pointing them out.

exploration, presumably within a discipline, domain, activity or materiality to anchor the further definition of intention. Additionally, reflection and practice (as in performing actions coordinated by skill and phronesis belonging to the specific practice and discipline) can provide exploratory entrances into the triad, which, in the first sub-practice, has as its purpose to trace the production and direction of intention towards the possibilities for the work.

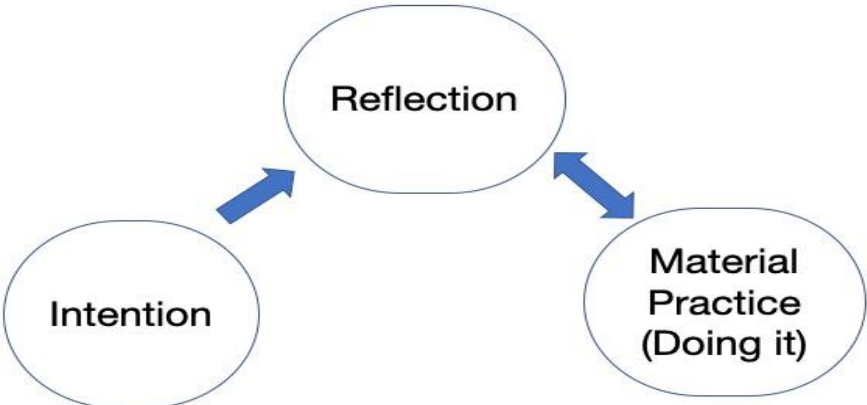
Figure 2a situates the exploratory stage of practice at the start of the process: looking for something for an artwork to be about. With a given intention, that node could also be seen as the starting point of the circle, guiding the exploration of the intention through the domain. Furthermore, the outcome of stage (and model) 2b could be a starting point of the practical execution of the intention.



Artmaking as hermeneutics Figure 2a

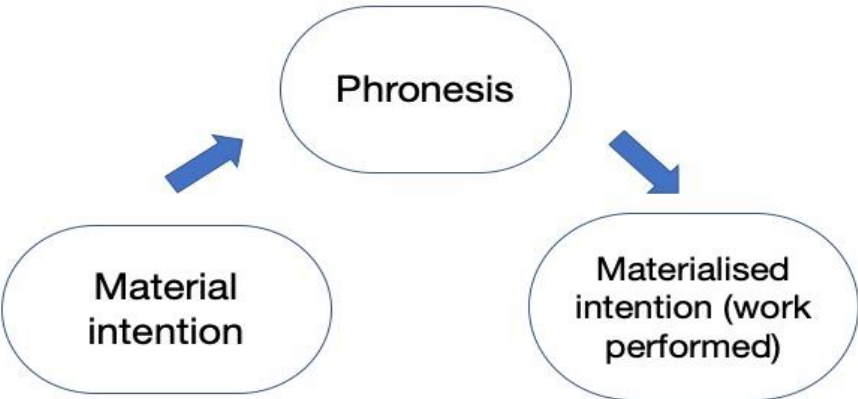
The purpose of this triad is to explore a field for resonance or consonance with a given or emerging focus of interest. That intention (as emerging and developing) is the product of this phase. The possibility of failure exists in a collapsing connection between field and intention as a part of exploratory practice. A possibility for the emergence of (productive) failure (after) would exist in the choice or definition of intention that results from a 'failing cycle' and, upon acknowledgement, results in a reiteration. Exploratory practice can be regarded as being about asking 'what' in a stage where all may be possible, before narrowing the focus on the possible through the intention and the question. Reflective practice can be regarded as asking 'why', whereas 'how' can be regarded to introduce the intention thus developed into a next stage.

Figure 2b situates the reflective stage in the practice, starting from intention as ‘produced’ in a previous stage or transferred from work or reflection outside of this process. It can be thought to focus on the transformation of an idea to a plan to have it ‘materialise’ in the context of artmaking. Suggested feedback exists between reflection and practicing, thinking and doing. Material practice can be sound, image, text or any (even immaterial) medium that can introduce the intention in the intersubjective domain as an activity or product.



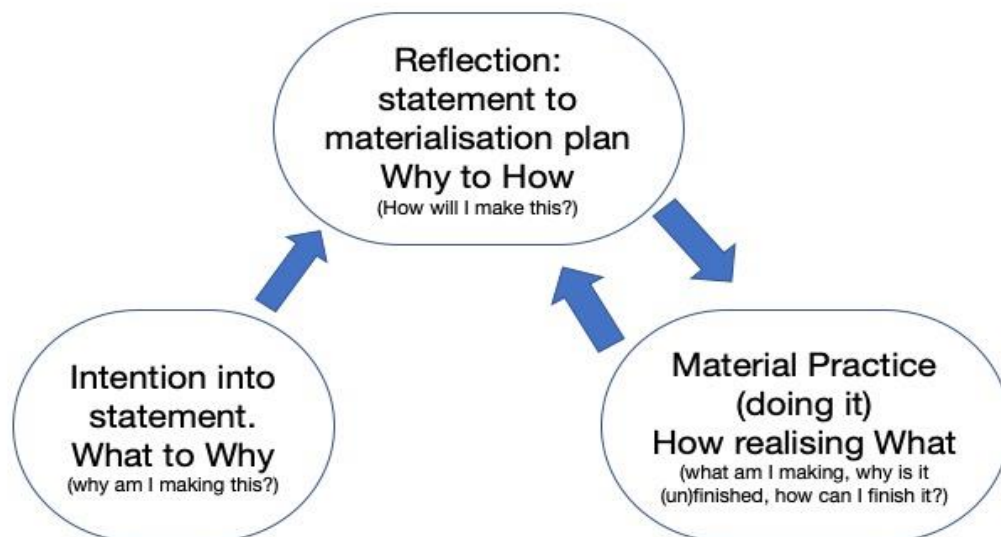
Artmaking as hermeneutics Figure 2b

Figure 2c situates material practice, starting from the plan for material translation of the intention as produced in the previous stage. Here, the discipline and the artist’s technical control over the medium chosen is presented as ‘phronesis’ – ‘practical wisdom’.



Artmaking as hermeneutics Figure 2c

The question to be answered in material practice here is ‘how?’ It is intended to result in the creation of a product that may answer and connect the previous why-what-how questions, as well as open up a new horizon of unanswered questions disclosed by the tension between intention and results, consequently opening up a new phase of exploration. This points out the resultant work itself as possibly functioning as a space of exploration that precedes the intention of a new process of artmaking. How do these three sub-practices connect? Looking at the intended (successful or failed) transformations that are their contribution to the process, I end up with a proposed Figure 3.



Artmaking as hermeneutics Figure 3

Figure 3 presents the execution or performance of intention as a step to ‘make’ the product of the creative process. If the ‘how’ and ‘what’ in this stage’s product open up new horizons, the exploratory qualities it may need to feed back into reflection and (re)intending, represented in the two arrows, indicate the route which ‘failure’s result’ follows. The process here moves from ‘why’ to a hypothetical ‘how’. The answer comes from the ‘what’ of materiality, irrelevant to whether the work materialises in sound, words, embodiment or matter. Here, failure of one of the transformations to be productive will halt or pause the circle, from the realised ‘what’ back to ‘why’ or ‘how’, returning the process to the moment previous to the failure. Iteration of the intentions undertaken in ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ may be necessary, based upon reflection on the nature and specifics of the interrupting failure. The work/result/product will be

successful as being resonant with the constraints suggested by the intention and its transformations if the horizons of the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the work's creation convene and merge in it.

3.2.2 *A Need for Failure*

In this manner, failure in this process presents continuation of the process of articulation of knowledge production, where success is only a final result-status that presents a static of closure contrasting with the dynamic of failure and iteration. In the articulation of knowledge, the horizons of failure and success merge with each other in the epistemological horizon of possibility they help articulate. For this merger, success and failure must be reconceptualised as equivalent parts of the process. As intimated in the introduction of the mode of failure as operationalised through failure's social resonance as signified by the artist, this consists importantly of a re-evaluation of failure as a productive concept. This is an important part of what the argumentation in this thesis works towards: to fully engage with the articulatory qualities of both success and failure. As an illustration I would like to cite the discourse on artistic research, where such an ambition is refreshingly articulated by AR scholar Victoria Pérez Royo, who borrows inspiration from Roland Barthes.

In her engaging article, *About Research in the Arts, a Lover's Discourse* (Perez Royo 2015), Perez Royo labels failure as 'catastrophe' and positions it in AR, with herself as the researcher. She proposes not to regard catastrophe as a crisis, but as an event to be embraced. She argues that 'the catastrophe is understood as an opportunity, since it gets the researcher to do the very necessary job of dispensing with many of the lines of research that she had open and many of the materials on which she had been working and which are perceived, following the purification that the catastrophe brings about, as non-essential or as clutter' (Perez Royo 2015, 126). With this, I argue that the revealing force of the metaphor of (artistic) research is at work in presenting a clear comparison to artmaking itself, as the part that (A)PaR can play as a discursive and reflexive subdomain of artmaking in situating failure as a structuring dynamic in the making of art as in research.

3.3 Conclusion

An overview of hermeneutics, previously argued as a privileged method for (A)PaR, has resulted in a hermeneutic model to situate and contextualise failure in this process. This model and these diagrams present the function and instrumentalisation of failure as part of the hermeneutic creative process, articulating rupture, reset, reflection and iteration as the 'reflexive development' part of the process, which is intended to release its result or product as 'success' from the viewpoint of the makers. In the beginning of the sixth chapter, these models are used to reflect on and analyse the data gathered from a number of artist interviews. In the next chapter, I examine how this 'catastrophe' – which is arguably used here as a synonym for failure - functions in practices involving 'live' performance for an audience as understood through the second mode: the acknowledged possibility of failure.

4 Acknowledging the Possibility of Failure: Productive Failure in the Second Mode

4.1 Introduction

The focus in the previous chapter was on situating failure in the practice of making art, using elements from the discourse on (A)PaR to define and illustrate the processes of artmaking to argue towards its use in the hermeneutical process. In the case of (A)PaR, text and documentation produced as part of the research can play a role in finding an entrance into this, as can description of 'professionally interpreted' aesthetics and the practiced rationality they bring to the conversation. The hermeneutic processes and sub-process of artmaking have been argued to find themselves a catalyst in failure by way of the use of its dynamic of articulating these processes. The iterative creative process which expresses the intention of the maker can be thought to metaphorically 'talk to the maker' through the dialectical qualities implied in hermeneutics. Once the process is finished, through the same metaphor, the work that is the product of the making will 'talk' with its audience, sharing its knowledge as experience, be it tacit, embodied or otherwise beyond an experience in words.

4.2 Presentation and Performance

In works of performing arts and performance art, however, an important part of this conversation through art consists of the performance of the artwork or of ideas created as a preparation for performance and is held on a different moment, on a different platform. In a 'live' performance, which is always open to the possibility of failure to a certain extent, the tacit meta-dialogue between performers and audience that acknowledges this possibility has been argued to have the capacity to vitalise the performance as well as to reposition the audience towards it. This presupposes a different position of the work, and the process of the performance of work compared to that, of a 'composed' and finely rehearsed performance or a static or otherwise 'finished' artwork such as a sculpture, book or painting being presented in exhibition. In 'performing arts', when open to the possibility of failure, the conversation in which the work is shared between makers and audience takes place at the time and at the location of performance.

Even if it might not be the 'exhibition' of a work that has an independent existence, it is always the consequence of a preparatory phase that reveals the characteristics of artwork as argued in the previous chapter and subchapter. The dynamics of live performance are different in how they can situate themselves in interaction with a live audience and with a range of possible circumstances for their presentation. It is for this reason that a triadic structure of the process as a relatively fixed series of events does not suffice for the structural description of performing arts. The question to be answered in this chapter is, 'How can we describe the interactive dynamics of these processes and how they situate failure acknowledged as a possibility in their structure?'

4.2.1 The Acknowledged Possibility of Failure as an Affordance for Participation

In his book, *Postdramatic Theatre*, the German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann prominently describes the move in theatrical performance over the past half-century from an aesthetics of representation to an aesthetics of experiencing (Lehmann 2006, 137). The engagement of artists and audience with the work of performance through the possibilities of failure and indeterminacy as elements vitalising the performance is an important part of this change. It creates a shared space of indeterminacy that affords a different interaction with the performance work by both artists and audience. In this set-up for performance, the difference between 'work' as a creative process and as a product (which is, in this case, immaterial) is bound to disappear as it exhausts itself in the work as it is uniquely experienced in the performance. Moreover, the unfinished performance – including all of the possibilities introduced and actualised by allowing room for uncertainty, doubt and failure – can be regarded as 'the work' itself. With this I mean artwork functioning as process in its progress in performance and again as (temporarily finished?) product in its final ending. The sense of actualisation that is experienced between performers and audience is arguably a first step in involving both groups in the work as shared live in the moment. How does this happen? Let me present two convergent lines of thought that I consider relevant in this discourse.

4.2.2 Performance, Poetics and Politics of Failure

As argued widely in the discourse on failure in performance, mediated perfection has acquired normative status in a global cultural context, allowing for blandness and de-individuation (LeFeuvre 2010, 16. Lehman 2006, 185). Against this ground, the figure of failure, or even of imperfection, has become a political statement on its own. In the same sense, participative engagement with art as providing a possibility for engagement with new experiences beyond consumption has become such a statement as well. In her 2010 book, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, the British performance scholar Sara Jane Bailes presented a politics of aesthetics that purposes the theatre, as she ideally sees it, toward destabilising the social and societal affirmative function and hierarchy of aesthetics that she argues as defining an important traditional function of art and performance. In reference to Karl Marx's statement that representation of the bourgeois values in art and theatre reflects as well as sustains those values, she then consequently extends her aesthetic argument to hold for a politics of 'performance theatre' in a potentially transforming role towards its societal context.

As Bailes argues, 'Representation offers an arena in which to refract, deflect, extend, challenge or entirely reject dominant political assumptions and beliefs' (Bailes 2010, 146). This challenges the artists who connect with a political engagement towards change to 'produce a different world after a different image' (Bailes 2010, 36). According to Bailes, the artist can achieve this by integrating failure into the ontology of the performance work. The intention here consists of questioning the traditional social function of the theatre, which she sees as consisting of an affirmation of social status quo and connected values. Her presentation of failure and constraint as destabilising factors in the theatre engages the audience with these critical politics in a manner that, in its intent, brings Bertolt Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* to mind, as well as his politics of engaging the audience as he explained in his '*Kleines Organum*' (Brecht 2014, 179-209). For Bailes, it is a political move to allow failure in the work. 'When failure is inscribed into the conceptualisation of the work, the work's ontology alters, and a different economy is established. What new economies are activated here that might topple aesthetic power structures, or cause the theatre event to hierarchically realign?' (Bailes 2010, 99).

4.2.3 *Post-Dramatic Engagement and Audience Participation*

In a related train of thought, Hans-Thies Lehmann intends a post-modern positioning of theatre and performance in artistic and political discourse (Lehmann 2006). Preceding Bailes, his thoughts help to situate the perspectives expressed by Bailes, most notably in the intentions of renewing theatre in form and function. When he describes a performance of Heiner Müller's play, *'Hamletmaschine'*, and its actors and audience, he explains: 'For the performers, the "action" of speaking, reading, improvising without a plot, role or drama represents a challenge. In this arrangement they are not afforded the protection of the stage, being open to all sides, including the back, to the gaze, the de-concentration, perhaps also the disturbance and aggression of impatient or annoyed visitors. [...] People (actors) [...] did not "play", did not use sets, had no "roles" but spoke the text [...] with the disciplined freedom of improvisation. [...] They were "disseminating" the text over the space' (Lehmann 2006, 123). I would argue that the risk-taking which Lehmann describes is closely connected to what I call 'engaging with the possibility of failure' in this thesis. In that same context I would like to draw attention to his movement to disarm the binary between failure and success by introducing 'taking up the challenge' as the intention behind the performance (rather than the making or composition) of the work to create an experience of authenticity in questioning all intention.

As an arguable inspiration to Bailes, Lehmann subsequently explains the political purpose of the theatre as structurally representing as well as presenting the change it may create in the world. As a practice it could engage with the other performing arts as well, such as dance and music, injecting a new optimism into the future of the stage: 'Theatre is political precisely to the degree in which it interrupts the categories of the political itself, deposing of them instead of betting on new laws (no matter how well-intended)' (Lehmann 2006, 179). Lehmann defines the position of the 'live' theatre in relationship to the media as specific by describing it through the persuasive qualities that 'live' theatre lacks. In 'mediated' forms these characteristics of 'perfection', 'immersion' and the possibility of exact reproduction afford easier access and a more passive, consumption-based connection with the artwork. 'We enter into (mediated) contact with everything, and simultaneously experience ourselves as radically detached from the plethora of facts and fictions we are being informed about'

(Lehmann 2006, 185). He and Bailes posit this as the call that the theatre, as being about the world, should answer through its capacities to challenge the status quo of art and of society if it is to remain relevant artistically as well as politically.

The characteristics and qualities with which Lehmann engages to implement such a politics on stage highlight the presence and open-endedness of communication and interaction in exchange and engagement through participation of all 'actors'. The experience of connection and the perception of work are shaped by openness to experience and engagement from the side of the audience. Even though the word 'failure' is rarely used in Lehmann's work, it opens up an ecology of scripting, dramaturgy and presentation in performance that prepares and occupies the same territory in art as does Bailes' 'poetics of failure'. However, Lehmann's writing emphasises and situates the qualities of failure and the related liveness more as an exemplified purpose of drama and theatre than as a coherent model to help understand how failure connects the participants in performance.

4.3 A Structure to Situate Failure in Performance

In the previous chapter the situational dynamics of failure in hermeneutics were proposedly 'caught' in a number of models where they can be traced. Where these models are relevant to describe the creative process by way of reduction, in performing arts a model would have to describe audience in-group interaction, actors' in-group interaction and the interaction between those groups. It would also have to focus on work that includes the possibility of failure as a vitalising dimension of performance. This is argued by Bailes and Powers to be the case generically with contemporary performance work as produced in the past four decades. Additionally, it should describe performance work that specifically thematises failure as content of the performance, as in the likelihood of a possible failure event on stage, such as in a circus performance where excitement creates audience involvement. The dynamic of an interactive system makes a transparent, static model of the working of failure in performances less likely to be able to provide and organise relevant information. It would be too complex for practical purposes of interpretation and understanding.

Reading the descriptions given by Power and Bailes and interpreting the work of Lehmann, I must conclude that the dynamic of the possibility of failure in performance is operationalised in a complex set of interactive processes. When compared to the situation of failure in hermeneutics, a model such as used there cannot render the complexity of the live situation. Only by bracketing most of the elements can one vector at a time be researched, but not in a simultaneous dynamic relationship to the liveness that emerges from the situation as a whole. For that reason, instead of a model, I propose a metaphor for a drama contingent on the possibility of failure: the circus. Although a frame or format of performance itself, the connection of the circus with its audience is almost fully predicated on the staging of the possibility of failure. For this reason, I argue that the resultant clarity of function of failure and unfulfillment of expectation makes the circus a fitting format for metaphorical comparison with the role of the possibility of failure in theatre or art performance.

4.3.1 Circus as Metaphor

Merriam-Webster describes the '[circus](#)' as 'circus performance' and the site of its presentation, but also as 'something suggestive of a circus (as in frenzied activity, sensationalism, theatricality, or razzle-dazzle)'. It is also a historical site for the possibility of failure in performance to engage the audience in its positive and negative identification with a gladiator who is about to lose or win his life in the classic Roman circus. Moreover, the contemporary circus, as it has existed for some 150 years, has become a 'theatre of failure', where failure is continuously thematised as a dramatic possibility and embodied in its performances, from the tightrope to the lion's cage and the clown's paradoxical success as a tragic failure. The circus as site and event also shares many characteristics with Gadamer's 'Fest', by being a specific and literally extraordinary place in time and space, and by generating a specific engagement and participation in the audience. It does this through the momentaneous actualisation of the experiencing of community between all participants through the pervasive possibility of failure, on which most of the appeal of the circus for its audience is contingent.

Circus itself, as a combination of elements of performance, can achieve the theatrical dimension of the drama in its performance in presenting the possibility of failure as a

dimension of vital engagement with the audience. In *Circus as Multimodal Discourse*, Paul Bouissac argues that failure can be part of the design of circus as an event, creating the possibility of failure being spectacularised for the (first-time) audience. 'In some acts, an artistic impression of chaos is crafted according to a rigorous choreography which becomes apparent after several viewings of the performance' (Bouissac 2012, 31). In this sense the circus arguably presents a stylised performance of the elements mentioned by Power and Bailes as introduced by failure. For that reason, I argue that it can be used as a model for the destabilising 'impression of chaos' presented by performances operationalising contingencies afforded by the open-ended introduction of the possibility of failure.

I propose to use the dynamic of circus as a multi-faceted model to describe one embodied phenomenon (theatrical performance) with the help of another (one of the possible performances from the frame of circus) that will be considerably more transparent and explicit in its signification of failure. A tightrope walker metaphorises the tension towards failure that can be felt on stage when a performer engages with the audience through his courage and vulnerability. The visual 'understanding' of the work of a trapeze group can help define roles, dependencies and dynamics in a theatrical situation, as the role of the clown can help understand the deconstruction of the premises of representation and order in general. The circus as a whole can offer a series of experientially embodied 'models' in the format of metaphor, which can help gain an understanding of failure as operationalised in performance.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the interactive dynamics that failure introduces in the performance of art and artworks are too complex to be represented in this model. Additionally, I proposed the metaphoric model of a circus as a fitting descriptor of, or sometimes in comparison to, the possibility of failure as situated in performance. These models are used in Chapter 5 to correlate and analyse information from a set of artist interviews that examine the function of failure in the creation of art as well as in the art performance processes that themselves are also further situated in the practice of the artists interviewed. First, however, the effect of the cultural resonance of failure is described as an overarching phenomenon functioning mostly as a constraint of or an

affordance for the other two modes of failure, which were more explicitly explained in the first two chapters.

5 Counterproductive Failure: the Third Mode

5.1 Introduction

Where the discourse underlying the understanding of productive failure in art allows for description in model and metaphor, the discourse on counterproductive failure appears to consist of artwork and fictional narrative presenting and describing individual failed, flawed or paradoxical actions, attempts and results. In this chapter I argue that counterproductive failure demonstrates its work in artmaking and performance as constraining and prohibiting. However, it exists also in paradox: the possibility of ignoring the impossibility of attempt and undertaking, entering the realm of the virtual through narrative and the imagination. Icarus did soar before he fell; Orpheus did negotiate his entrance into the realm of the hereafter and his return before he faltered. However counterproductive their undertakings ended in mythical failure, it afforded their engagement with the impossible.

It is also because of my research developing in resonance to the previous modes of failure and their results that this research itself led me to discover the relevance and unexpected possibility of the signified social resonance of failure. I needed to become aware of my own subconscious preference of the term 'crisis' for the moments where failures in reasoning and interpretation made it necessary for me to revise the work of this thesis to realise that resonance with, or sensitivity to, the experience of failure playing a part in any enterprise where something is at stake on an existential level. Writing a thesis is not about life or death, but a lifelong career in music preceding this experience provided me with enough recognition to realise that success and failure are more than a language game and a proposition on construction and actualisation in art.

5.2 Failure Signified in Art

What I refer to as the third mode of failure – signified (social) resonance of failure in art – is predicated on acknowledgement of a previous failure or of a previously proven impossibility as fact. The 'lifeworld' is an important resonance chamber for the experience of failure on an existential level, but so is conceptualisation and thematisation of failure in art, although one step further removed from failure as a lived experience. Social resonance is arguably individually defined by how the fact of failure

is experienced and by how this experience produces the consequent constraints, prohibitions and possibilities that belong to the creation and performance of art. At the end of Chapter 2, I addressed the specificity of the hermeneutics of art-making as belonging to the *Eigenzeit*, the sphere of play. Taking on the format of a game and acknowledging productive failure as being a part of this game opens up the understanding of play as a game to a comparison with art practice. The same metaphor arises in understanding the role of counterproductive failure in making and performing art.

Playing a game implies inclusion of the players; inclusion implies the possibility of exclusion. Grades of exclusion were mentioned by Bourdieu and Shotton, cited in the introduction, as a result of socially experienced failure. Given this, I propose to approach the experience of failure as a spoiler of the playfulness on which the game is predicated. It is an affordance for playing and thus risking your game as a move belonging within the game itself, not a move that risks exclusion. In the latter case, a self-assessment as 'a possible failure' constrains the quality of free play and the game, contingent upon how the artist copes with her resonance with failure as a social concept. This may work for competitive activities such as sports but not necessarily for the openness to possibility in making art.

Taking one step away from the metaphor would bring the conclusion that the social resonance of failure constrains or even prohibits the work of art. Taking one step farther backwards, however, can reveal failure as the subject of artwork, allowing a resilient artist an experience to share and to be experienced through her art. It may very well be for this reason that counterproductive failure in art has its acknowledgement and discourse in literature and art itself, while the extended meta-discourse on counterproductive failure outside of art appears to be limited by a focus on a pathology of shame; in recent decades, this concept has attracted a growing interest in psychology and psychiatry. This proposes two modes in which the artist can respond to the signified social resonance of failure. The first is in the mode of coping on an individual level: by restraint, redoubled effort, depression or other coping mechanisms employed by the artist. A second mode of coping with failure can be through thematisation in art by the artists, sharing – or appropriating – the experience of failure through narrative or thematised in other forms of art.

5.3 Failure as Abject

Both sub-modes of counterproductive failure mentioned above acknowledge the resonance of failure by coping with it ‘defensively’, accepting restraint or abstaining from work, or engaging with it through thematising it in their work. Both modes are contingent upon, and emerging from, the application and invitation of failure as described in the first two (productive) modes. Consequently, the discourse on counterproductive failure in art itself consists essentially of the thematisation in artwork employing these two modes – sourcing and sharing experience. This situates the information on counterproductive failure in art on a different level from that of the first two modes: It is situated in the discourse *in* art itself rather than the discourse *on* art. The discourse on counterproductive failure in art as describing experiences of coping exists primarily in the thematisation of failure as content in literature, as anecdotal information. Failure then is exemplified in a thought experiment, for example, as part of a character study in a narrative on its occurrence in literary and cinematic fiction and non-fiction, such as biographies about artists and artmaking. In literature it has turned into an often-used trope of the social and artistic failure of the artist, on the romantic presentation of which much narrative content is predicated. In this way thematisation of failure can render counterproductive failure productive in a move in which it appropriates the experience of failure, one’s own or belonging to another subject or even a fictionalised one, as subject for making art.

A well-known and possibly first example of failure thematised in narrative is Honoré de Balzac’s story, ‘*The Unknown Masterpiece*’ (Balzac 2013). It was written in 1831, six years before the first report of the possibility to ‘become a failure’ in the English language. The story’s protagonist, the imaginary master-painter Frenhofer, has lost control of a 10-year-long process of the making of what is intended to be his greatest work. Frenhofer has devoted all of his efforts to the work, yet continuously finds that he has failed. He reworks it exhaustively after each acknowledged failure to the point where it has completely lost coherence and signification as a result of an ‘over-articulated’ excess of information. Frenhofer is confronted with this failure when he is forced to display the painting to two colleagues. This failure itself is then subsequently successfully thematised as a narrative about the social resonance of failure, which the tale glorifies in a melancholic way. The failure of the artist to understand himself or

make himself be understood, which resounds widely in romantic literature, contributes to the image of the artist victimised by his art and his lack of control over its creative process (Le Feuvre 2016, 14). After acknowledging his failure as total, as 'becoming a failure', Frenhofer burns his paintings and then dies. On this his writer, Balzac, successfully establishes a wider romantic tradition in literary fiction of narrative about the artist falling victim to his art, as is subsequently followed in countless biographies and artworks dedicated to historical or fictional artists.

Variations on this narrative, demonstrating more tempered examples of unproductive failure at work in artmaking, can be found in the biographies of artists such as Vincent van Gogh. His failure was an economic and social one; his work has more than survived it. Failure through caving in to social pressures or substance addiction is a more commonly illustrated form in which failure as a signified social resonance works as a constraining and prohibitive dynamic in art practice. Going by anecdotal evidence, some artistic disciplines and some historical periods allow more or less possibility for the development of resilience. The success of the artist as failure, however, has mostly existed in the narration of his or her struggle against external or internal resonances of the experience of failure, emphasising specificity rather than generic elements, such as a failing economy or specific drugs being used as status symbols in specific historical circumstances. Wars, pandemics, famines and dictatorships as well as morphine, alcohol, cocaine, marijuana and heroin have strengthened or weakened the resonance of failure, compared to other substances and periods. Challenging the resilience and tenacity of individual artists in various ways and with various responses, it emphasises the difference between artists. Additionally, it emphasises that counterproductive failure, specifically failure experienced through the negative signification of its social resonance, is not an easy asset to art practice.

5.4 And as Actualising the Impossible

In its second sub-mode, the counterproductive realisation of failure as expressed in artwork itself can also thematise the maker's intention and the relationship with the possibility of its realisation as its central question. Failure can appear in visual artwork as a presentation of the paradox it questions. When performance artist Francis Alÿs attempts and fails to deliver a block of ice by dragging it through Mexico City in the

heat of summer, what may he be succeeding at? I argue that, in this way, art can be understood to poetically deconstruct the opposition between productive and non-productive. I would like to illustrate this with a paradox in performance, referring to Bruce Nauman's 'classic' double-exposed photograph, *Failing to Levitate in the Studio* (Nauman 1966). It depicts the presentation of failure by its representation as a(n) (im)possibility. He does this by confronting the spectator with an attempt at the impossible: the artist's body collapsed as well as hovering over two chairs, not levitating, addressing that illusionary possibility by attending to its absence (Priest 2013, 10).

The question Nauman poses in this work is whether this failure is a success, if interpreted as a proposition on intentionality in the mode of engagement with failure. Here, the work illustrates the potential of failure in the construction as well as in interpretation of artistic work, representing failure and its performance in a manner that hints at yet another possible mode: the (poetically denied or questioned) certainty of failure. The poetic or imaginative dimension of the work exists in presenting the impossible as inherent in the failed attempt to achieve it. Its statement refers to the possibility of a politics of failure – presenting the impossible – as well as a poetics of failure, representing the intention to achieve the impossible or deny its impossibility. Looking at art practice and performance, I would argue that the solution of an impossibility in the realm of the virtually possible in this manner can also be considered a strategy of artmaking.

Such work as produced by Nauman and Alÿs belongs to the discourse *on* and *in* art. It contributes to both discourses by offering a poetic ambiguity as a resolution of the opposition of productivity against counterproductivity in the work itself, rather than to a discursive resolution of the categorisation that is put into question. It does not acknowledge the social resonance of failure by signification, but it functions on the basis of the poetical resonance of failure as signified through the work of art. Through the ambiguity of its performance, it allows for its signification to remain unresolved, the unresolved ending being characteristic of the work and a claim on the audience to participate by taking up the question the work poses.

It is also for these reasons that I would argue for two possible interpretations of the mode of counterproductive failure, both existing in the experiential rather than the discursive domain. The first-mentioned interpretation as a mode of signification of social resonance of failure acts out in constraint and prohibition of practice. The second interpretation of the resonance of failure as a poetic resonance positions this mode in the domain of artmaking itself. It acts out as affording acknowledgement of the impossible as possible when constructed in the mode of failure as a poetic gesture, rendering the resonance as productive in the construction and ambiguous signification in art. In using the term 'acting out', I refer to the performative constructive quality which art allows the resonance of failure in this possibilisation of the virtual as an act of performative worldbuilding by interpretation.

5.5 Failure as Experienced in and Through Art

As I argued just now, counterproductive failure and its experience can be thematised as an existential mode in fictional narrative through storytelling and in performance art through a poetic deconstruction of impossibility as a failed possibility. By this action it actualises the impossible as an imaginable experience by way of the paradox it creates in the possibility for interpretation it offers. In these representations as 'thought experiments', failure also demonstrates the openness to disbalance that the work asks from the artist. In achieving her intention, her work and possibly her artistic and social stability are at stake, which can result in artistic or social failure. Its description finds its place in narrative and myth. Vincent van Gogh's famous status of failure during his lifetime can be cited as an example, albeit an extreme one, involuntarily thematising failure until van Gogh's 'voluntary' death. This is where failure becomes deeply personal by adding a characteristic to the subject the work 'represents as maker'. This is where the maker (of art and other creations) can become 'a failure' or 'a success'. This is also the realisation of failure that is thematised as inevitably linked to success as its binary, and in that way failure is defined as a state or event in social or economic traffic, where success is not only a possible but also an intended outcome.

There is no success without the possibility of failure, no failure without success as a possible outcome of the undertaking. This is experienced even more so in reference to the romantic myth of the socially failing artist if the success is posthumous (Bourdieu

1993, 116), as in the case of Van Gogh. The failure of the fictional or historical artist can become the writer's success, as with Balzac's story, making the acknowledgement of possible counterproductive failure productive in its narrative interpretation. Consequently, for understanding this experiential content of the processes of artmaking and art performance, this mode offers interpretation as a method. The intention of research through this mode is to understand the role of failure as a counterproductive constraint as well as the role of failure to access virtual possibilities offered by the several sub-modes of resonance, which propose the concept of failure as culturally signified or philosophically challenged. I argue that the understanding of both categories of failure being dependent on the experience of failure and the interpretation thereof suggests the reduction of both counterproductive categories of failure to one category – the signified social resonance of failure. This works to create conditions of possibility and constraint that can result in both making and performing art or in constraining the creation and performance of art. The individual coping strategies of the artist(s) and other contextualising factors such as resilience, social context and signification are decisive in the role of failure in possibility and restraint regarding art.

6 Failure in Practice

6.1 Introduction

This chapter compares the theory and models describing the role of failure in artmaking with the explanations and analyses provided in interviews with four artists and artist-researchers. In these interviews the artists describe their practical approach to artmaking and performance as well as the challenges and possibilities created in these processes by considering failure. The conclusions of this comparison are analysed in reference to both modes of failure that have become basic premises for this research: 'engagement with failure' and 'engagement with the possibility of failure'. The operationalisation of failure as a culturally signified term is addressed as part of a final meta-analysis of the interviews.⁴ It is considered as emerging from and feeding into the art practice as represented in the discussion on the realisation of the first two modes. The data examined in this chapter consist of texts selected from interviews conducted with artists on the subject of their practice as a possible ecology for the operationalisation of failure. Two of those interviews were conducted by the author, and two of them were taken from the 2014 [NEA Publication](#) *The Art of Failure*, which presents an approach to the description and research of failure and its operationalisation in art that resonates with the questions posed in this thesis.

The interviews are presented in two rounds of interpretation and analysis of a selection from the entire interview texts. It is my intention to use the space which 'small-n' research affords to implicate context and difference. In the first round, excerpts of the interviews are analysed by asking the question: How is failure situated in the artist's practice? In the second, the same excerpts are analysed in terms of theory and also in comparison with the models as constructed and metaphors chosen in the previous chapter to answer the question: How does art theory 'situate' acknowledged failure in artmaking and the artist's practice? The consequent question is: What do the data tell us regarding the role of failure in artmaking and performance when organised by use of the three modes that have been developed? The answers to those questions are presented and discussed in the last chapter as leading to the answers to the main

⁴ Even though the intended meaning of 'cultural signification' resonates strongly with elements from Bourdieu's concept 'Habitus', I have chosen to use the term not to implicate discourses that intersect on one meaning only.

question of this thesis, 'How do productive and counterproductive failure work in the making and performance of art?', and the consequent sub-questions. However, to better situate the answers provided in the interviews, I begin this chapter by further defining the concept of practice as a context from which the interviewees respond and which connects their statements with their activities as artists.

6.1.1 Practice as Context

First, I briefly explore the concept of 'practice', to examine the artists' continuity of activity and reflection as makers of art and my own understanding and experience as a musician. Let me begin a further definition of practice by introducing myself as a musician, bringing the resonance of a discipline that works with specific significations of the term 'practice'. Importantly, a musician's practice consists of 'practicing', sustaining and expanding individual craftsmanship as well as interpersonal coordination in collective effort. First, this practice is alone with the instrument, to gain or retain fluidity in contact with music's ephemeral dimension, a fluidity that demands a constant unfolding in activity. Second, this practice is together in a group, band, orchestra or project, where musicians work together to prepare the performative interpretation of pre-existing work, or by preparing 'set-ups' for improvisational musical interaction. This belongs to the practicing and the practice of music, unfolding into many individual paths and practices. Practices connect through the development of an artist's specific identity, routine, phronesis and oeuvre, and simultaneously through cooperation and connection to other practices of the discipline and by the artists' embeddedness in society through the practice of making and performing artwork.

There is also the specificity of practice as a generic term which subsumes all of the different individual practices that belong to the field or domain of a discipline. What would specifically belong to art practice? Hans-Thies Lehmann describes theatre practice as an activity uniting 'sound technology and feast, dance and debate, set construction and philosophy. Thus, a scenic idea may arise from the combination of a theoretical idea, a technical condition, the physical expression of a performer and a poetic image, from a discussion between lighting technician, dramaturg, actor and author' (Lehmann 2006, 132). Here, he presents art practice as a broad engagement with all that art can be in the terms of the discipline of theatre. The strongest

characteristic of theatrical practice uniting art, life and the theatre is recognised when Lehmann argues that ‘theatre, as such, embraces the whole scale of human work, activity and possibilities of expression “in a nutshell”, as a microcosm’ (Lehmann 2006, 132). In this holistic reflection, I read Lehmann as defining the domain of art practice as embedded in the perception of life and making this situated experience accessible experientially in and through art. This is a conceptualisation of art and (A)PaR that I found to resonate throughout most of the interviews.

The interview data are sourced from the artists’ descriptions of their practices representing a comparable diversity of ‘work, activity and possibilities’ in the fields of theory, artmaking, scripting and performing theatre, literature and musical interpretation. The focus here is on the individual interpretation and the operationalisation of failure in the context of the individual practice. All of these are part of a broader domain of art practices, but the specifics in their contributions to this thesis that link to each specific praxis are argued to be essential for the understanding of the data. It is also for this reason that the data and their analysis are embedded in a description of the artists’ practice.

6.2 Interviews annotated

The data I examine in this chapter consist of material taken from a number of artist interviews on the subject of failure. The first two interviews were selected from the 2014 NEA publication, [The Art of Failure](#), which contains seven interviews. Two of those were chosen as relevant for this thesis through their considerable contribution to the diversity of views on the subject of failure. Next are two interviews which I conducted in the summer of 2019, involving artists practicing forms of (A)PaR. For the annotated part, a selection of the content of the four interviews has been used. The full text of the latter two interviews is attached. The full text of the first two interviews is accessible through hyperlink (above). In the first two rounds of presentation and interpretation, the interviews are ordered individually per artist. In the third and last round, the structure of content and analysis has been presented thematically.

6.2.1 *Toni Morrison, Author*

When young Toni Morrison began reading, practically no Afro-American women writers were to be found in the local library to mirror her own identity in fiction. This prompted her decision to become a writer. Though not involved explicitly in creating her work as art or performing her practice as research, her lifelong practice in teaching English and as editor of books involving Afro-American culture next to her practice as a writer is expressed in the clear articulation of her experience and insights in the process of writing and her reflection on her own iterations in this. 'As a writer, a failure is just information. It's something that I've done wrong in writing, or is inaccurate or unclear. I recognise failure – which is important; some people don't – and fix it, because it is data, it is information, knowledge of what does not work. That's rewriting and editing [compares writing with doing research]. What you do is you identify the procedure and what went wrong and then correct it. If you think of [writing] simply as information, you can get closer to success' (NEA 2014. 2). Here, Morrison defines what appears to be a strategy to deconstruct the failure-success binary and move away from the possible pressure from its cultural resonance.

Morrison describes her writing process and its iterations as writing 'sections by hand and then put them on the computer, print them out, and then go over them to see what's not there or what's there that is just clogging it up' (NEA 2014. 2). In this way constraints of time and moments of definitive 'judgement' are acknowledged as 'givens' of her practice. Nevertheless, she emphasises the validation and navigation of all failures in the process, likening it to [improvised] music. She takes risks, rather than 'playing it safe': 'Stumbles loom rather large, the more I write. [...] they're very important. It's like hitting the wrong note. You have to do something else. [...] you can't say "Oops" and leave the stage. You have to make something out of that error, do a really powerfully creative thing. You may go down a different road. If it's public, you have to have that ability, that gift to make a mistake look creative. With writing, you can always scratch out the knowledge. You write and erase and do it over' (NEA 2014, 3). Morrison's engagement with productive failure as constructive through its acknowledgement is articulated here in a self-confident and clear manner that situates failure as detached from any constraint by cultural resonance.

6.2.2 *Geoff Nuttall, Violinist*

Violinist Geoff Nuttall is the leader of the long-lived Stanford-based St. Lawrence String Quartet. He participates in its musicmaking and is responsible for its practical and artistic functioning.⁵ Nuttall describes his responsibility as a group leader also as experiences in acknowledging and engaging with failure. He experiences failure when he considers himself as failing to live up to the group's intention of commitment in performance, especially when working with composers who share their creative process with the ensemble. 'When you're working with composers who are alive, [...] your main goal is to somehow get their creative vision out to the audience. So, failure, for me, is if a piece isn't well-received. If people go, "You guys did fine, but it's not a great piece" – that's our failure, not the piece's failure' (NEA 2014, 5).

In interaction with composers, the intended sense of commitment and responsibility can nevertheless function as counterproductive, as in Nuttall's description of cooperation with composer John Adams. 'We premiered [his] first string quartet [...]. It's really hard, and we worked to learn it and get it out there. [...]. Right after the concert, John came back and said, "You know, there's a section here, it's just not working. I'm going to cut it." This was like a hundred measures of the most difficult music in the whole piece. We automatically assumed that's a failure. We failed, because we didn't make it work. He said, "It's not that. It's about the shape of the thing." But that was a really interesting example of maybe if we'd done it better or more convincingly, then he would not have changed that work of art' (NEA 2014, 5). Here the focus on the artist's own failure can possibly create confusion, bringing in failure's cultural meaning in its inflexible comparison with Nuttall's intention of perfection in interpretation and performance.

emphasis

In the recording booth, such a high standard can emphasise the possibility of failure to the extent that a recording session becomes more like a challenge of playing under duress than for the possibility of failure to add a dimension of actualisation and contemporaneity, as can happen on stage. He clarifies the difference: 'The fear of failing on a record is horrible. That's why making records is so hard. [...] The great thing about live music is this sense of improvisation and discovery and risk-taking. [...] It's the act of going for it. On a record, it's there for posterity. [...] Recording creates one type of fear of failure, which is

⁵ At the time of the interview, the group had existed for 25 years, practicing and performing classic works as well as pieces by contemporary composers such as John Adams, Osvaldo Golijov, and Jonathan Berger.

really prominent and not fun. For me, playing live – nerves are always there. [But] when they limit what you can do, it's bad' (NEA 2014, 5). Nuttall also refers to failure as a catalyst in the process of learning: 'You have to find a balance between thinking you're tremendous and thinking you're horrible. Because if you go one way or the other too much, then you're going to fail. [...] If you're not constantly second-guessing your ability intellectually and emotionally and musically, technically, you won't get any better. [...] So, failure's crucial; it's just that there's no other way. You can't escape it. It's constant. The trick is to not let your failures affect the emotional experience of the audience. If you really go for it and fail, it's okay. If you don't go for it and fail, that's all people remember' (NEA 2014, 6). Here, again, Nuttall is referring to correctness in regards to an external criterion as the criterion for failure, positioning the experience in the 'live' situation of performance as a vitalising challenge.

In Nuttall's practice the acknowledged possibility of failure as inspiring excitement in performance exists alongside the possibility of failure as a paralysing experience in the studio: Live music plays with intentions in the moment versus its intended culmination in an enduring 'product'. Allowing for failure in live performance works quite differently from the recognition (or denial) of the possibility of failure as the elephant in the studio booth (NEA 2014, 5,6).

6.2.3 *Suzan Tunca, Dancer, Researcher*

Suzan Tunca is an accomplished and experienced dancer whose present practice consists of research undertaken in the context of her doctoral degree at Amsterdam University. The interview presented here was conducted by me in July 2019. In her description of this practice, Tunca successfully deconstructs the binary success-failure relationship as far as her research is concerned. She argues: 'It is a possibility to document the work from the inside out; it makes it possible to enter into dialogue with this, for myself, but also about it with the reader of the text. From this dialogue comes knowledge'. Her practice is about transformation; her hermeneutics exist in what she calls 'micro-shifts'. Where others use the more discursively textured term 'failure' to express the dialectical dynamics of process, Tunca thinks in terms of dialogue to achieve transformation as the intention of practice.

When Tunca describes her practice, she predicates her turn towards becoming a researcher on a career in modern dance: 'It is a condition of AR that you bring in your practice. Then, it always is the question of how you relate the academic type of knowledge generation to the non-verbal experiential dimensions of, in my case, dance. [...] Since 2013, I am gradually transforming my practice in dialogue with artistic research'. An important part of Tunca's practice concerns the daily restoration of the body for her work, 'warming up' as many physical disciplines acknowledge it, to 'have an instrument with space inside that can resonate. That plays a crucial role in the constriction of that materiality. Taking what is given: the body, gravity, space, time, sound. [...] But in the practice, catching and falling; in the micro-level, it happens every time. Failing, compensating failures, learning to reduce falling/failing, words that are somehow related'. The constraint of the experience is a challenge addressed in her work: 'The knowledge I search for is "gnosis", (another type of knowledge from learning to dance, tacit knowledge). I look for spiritual insights through the dancing body. It is my goal that the language itself propels me towards that'. Her embodiment of this process is operationalised as her 'epistemological tool'.

Tunca's method of research is 'retrospective dance-writing, a method that is emerging. I create and record video segments of nine seconds and slow it down in playback and write what is happening and write it down. Both on the body level and on the intentional level, what is happening at the level of body-mind, [I write down] what is happening with the psycho-physical entity. When I dance this will always be semi-unconscious. Recording makes it possible to engage with the text of the body'. The suggestion here is of a way of working that positions Tunca's research in a flowing style, which sustains a constant dialogue that is subsequently revisited as research of her own work as 'text'. It is a practice where the only failure, 'acknowledged as possible to ascribe to herself', would be not to commit herself to the practice. Once started, the dynamics of dialogue take over, registering material transformation in the context of a quasi-continuous 'doing' of practice.

6.2.4 Jan Deboom, Dancer, Performer

Failure is at the core of Jan Deboom's practice as dancer and performer: He embraces failure, as well as the outsider position it brings in the acted and lived non-conformism

that are his life and practice, creating a fluent and lived connection between art and artist.⁶ His work constantly thematises failure in process and result in a praxis that is constantly developing under the possibility of and engagement with failure. Furthermore, the practice itself is an expression of the refusal, or failure, to adapt to a culture that is partly defined by its emphasis on a social orientation in which success is a much more affirmatively resonant term than failure is. His artful failure can be seen as an act of resistance against such a culture and as an identification with that which the culture defines as abject. Deboom mentions 'potential' and 'non-conformist' as characteristics of failure. Non-conformism arguably takes the weight off the conformist interpretation of the word and emboldens the use of 'failure' in the discourse between conformism and non-conformism in art.

For Deboom, life itself appears to be a constant exploratory phase of his practice: 'The way I work: I start and I don't know where I will end up. In that sense it is already failing, at least for some people. It mainly fails to meet expectations. That in itself raises questions. Am I actually an artist or maybe I am doing something else? [...] The ability to ask that question is essential to me. While (in the artistic discourse in mainstream art) you should not actually do that. That's how it feels'. In his discursive approach to conformity to cultural values, Deboom appears to take up a liminal position between all domains of art and life he encounters, feeling free to question all of the fixedness that any such a domain and its boundaries provide.

A constant redirection and redefinition of failure in his practice is also connected to his lack of a clearly definable skill in leading his practice, other than an artistic openness and his experience as a dancer, which is hardly referred to and an absolute sense of commitment. 'I myself am very keen on a kind of research that looks incredibly clumsy and amateurish. But you clearly follow a certain route. That is the way of working, actually unsuccessful, in the sense that I sometimes do things that nobody notices. [...] That is to find the balance between performing and not performing, which I find an interesting boundary. You disappear into a haze of uncertainty, and nobody notices that your performance [is] underway'. This discursive deconstruction of the binary by

⁶ The interview with Jan Deboom took place in his living room in Gent on 28 August 2019. The original version was in Dutch. Google was used to translate, using only minimal correction.

investigating its potential for liminality by itself seems to be part of the way in which Deboom situates his creative activities in the world, creating a different awareness of and surrounding such differences.

In his ideal setting, he plays a directive yet selfless role in creating the context for an interactive performance: 'I think I want to put [the audience] in a different world. I then have an audience with which I want to create a kind of awareness that makes them count in the process in a different way, no longer as an audience but [in becoming] a group, in which everyone participates'. Consequently, Deboom wants to involve the audience in an emancipatory search for authenticity in the experience of the performance, intending group-hood by making his audience complicit in erasing the binaries of art and life, actor and audience and leader and group. As open as this structure of self-erasing directivity looks, working through it poses demands and intentions that open it up to 'uninvited' failure. 'As in my last performance [...] I really created something [like] "we are a group". I did have some strategies to do that, but ... I actually missed the audience during the entire rehearsal period, in the real practice of "now let's become a group". With the audience there, the step becomes too large, my experience too small, to create that immediately. Then you do not fully achieve your actual plan. But it becomes more for the longer term or so. That is then a real failure' (attachment 2, 100). The failure mentioned here is one that 'betrays' and defies the intention behind the work.

Thematising failure can also take place from different angles, such as by accepting constraints that (again) create an approximation of life in performance. The articulation of instability and fragility as a quality of authenticity in the performance can, in the perspective of Deboom's practice, be a chance occurrence, but also a strategy: 'I have also worked with choreographers who like to exhaust people before they come on stage, to create a kind of shakiness. I also play with that myself. Destabilise the situation to improvise. [...] If you can deal with that instability, it gives you a very stable feeling. I manage to stand in that unrest and instability. That gives – paradoxically – a sense of control'. (attachment 2, 100). In this way Jan Deboom thematises failure as affording exploratory starting points for performance and its operationalisation in research into questions of presentation versus non-presentation, again challenging the binary here. This strategy seems at the root of Deboom's challenges to reality, where

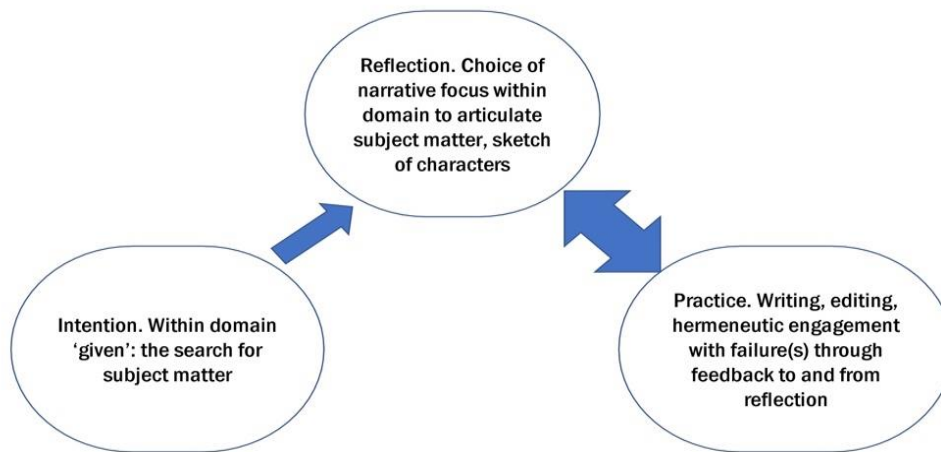
the catalyst role of failure is a tool for the deconstruction and questioning of situations and self-evidentialities rather than of hermeneutic production of knowledge. Non-conformism is also a (wilful?) failure to adapt to the social norm that defines, among other things, failure.

6.3 Looking at the Data through Models, Theory, Interpretation

In a second round of analysis and interpretation of data, I now look at the statements of each interviewee through the lens of the theory reviewed and the models deduced in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, with the intention of identifying correspondences and intersections. All observations here are made on the basis of the same text selection as sourced in 6.2. The question to be answered here is: ‘How can theory situate failure in the making and the performance of art?’

6.3.1 Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison explains the start of her writing career as her response to a void of literature which she could identify with as an Afro-American woman. Her constructive use of failure in pragmatic hermeneutics (‘failure is just information’) also includes the recognition and use of failure in a function that is congruent with the proposed basic model of hermeneutics, where reflection and practice function as the poles of a dialectical process. Her self-assuredness as to the correctness of her intuition in making choices, as expressed in ‘I do recognise failure’, fuels her hermeneutics, circling from reading to interpretation to acknowledgement of failure to rewriting and back to reading. In her comparison with musical improvisation, Morrison emphasises the differences between a ‘composer’ and an ‘improvisor’ of text. This last constructive mode suggests a reference to the creative process as ‘play’, as being able to playfully resolve ‘bumps’ and ‘oops’es within the continuous negotiation with time and intention the game-rules of improvisation allow. Her self-observations reveal failure working as a productive part of her writing practice, providing feedback that allows her to react, to process the ‘information’ of the failure and to change it in continuation and iteration of practice. In diagram:



6.3.2 Geoff Nuttall

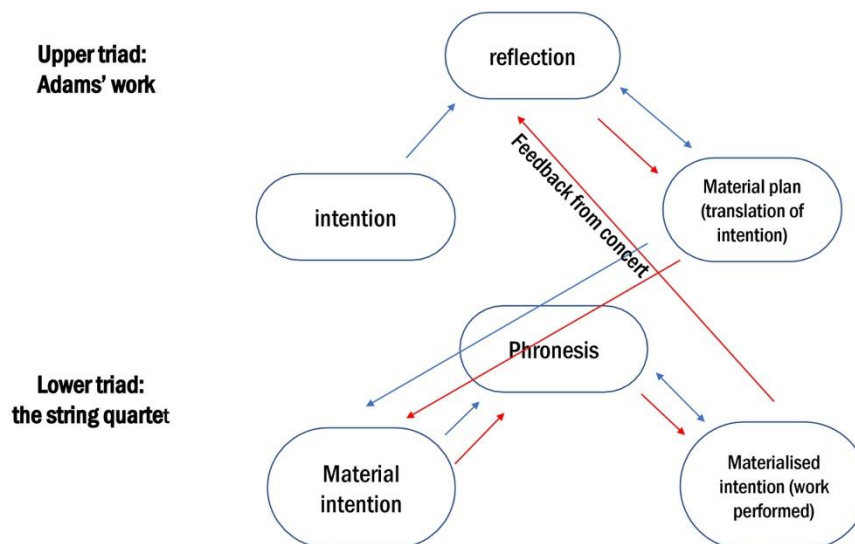
Geoff Nuttall's practice focusses on the performance of other people's 'musical scripts' as handed down in notation and as informed by a long tradition of chamber music practice. The multiplicity of activity and personal involvement arguably affords the operationalisations of all three modes of failure. The process of practicing with the quartet is a hermeneutic exercise: Beginning with the score as intention, reflection and interpretation enables a first run-through which, in acknowledging mistakes, misinterpretation and other failures, feeds back into the intention to be compared with the result of the first run-through. Then it is parsed up and iterated in practice again, erasing failure, to squeeze out the information that is music. Having to live up to the standards that this practice and its tradition imply, Nuttall is also vexed by insecurity when the possibility of an abject and enduring failure appears through the context of the recording studio. When 'playing in the moment' with an audience present there is a net of connecting moments that can accommodate many micro-mistakes as being part of the 'grit' of the performance. Referring to Gadamer's concepts 'play' and 'festival', I would argue that they could apply as an ideal-typical description of Nuttall's work. In the live context, this creates its own (acoustic) space and time in the experiencing of the work in a form of *Eigenzeit*, as it is called by Gadamer in his work on art as play. This can be created and sustained between players, the work and the audience as a situation of organically experienced coherence, where play itself and, in this case, the artwork which belongs to it define the horizons of the event as if this event were a unified, living entity (Gadamer 1993, 132-134).

In the studio context, a technologically mediated environment, this situation threatens to collapse under the anxiety surrounding possible failure, making the artist Nuttall less available to place his effort and self-confidence at risk in the interdependence of his work and his 'everyday' emotional life (Seel 1985, 124), thereby preventing the totality of commitment on which Gadamer's 'festival of play' is predicated. To better understand the influence of such a position on the perception of the phenomenon 'freedom', let me introduce a circus metaphor. For the tightrope walker, a net can make all the difference, providing safety yet simultaneously constraining the suspense that connects the artist to his audience. The awareness of having no net, on the other hand, also might introduce a negative spiral in the general 'availability' for the subject to deal with the situation, depending on the artist's self-confidence. However, I would argue that the awareness of a net, present or not, is crucial in defining this situation and in describing how the artists and audience experience it. The studio situation also has its 'net', affording a more playful negotiation with failure, since it is also a specific studio possibility to 'redo' the music and use the hermeneutical possibilities of the recording situation in iteration to optimise the final production of the work. It is the experienced fear of risk-taking, of putting one's work 'at stake', which operationalises the individually experienced resonance of failure as a constraint. The function of the studio is symbolic, connecting the artist to a mediated and mediating situation and, subsequently, connecting this situation to the audience. In this way, the finished product comes into being as a possibly even further perfected 'safe mediation' of the work, thematising the possibility of perfection rather than failure. The music is already finished and perfected and, as such, reified and made static and 'safe' when shared with the audience. As such, I would argue that this potentially constrains as well as liberates the 'freedom of play' in the mediated interaction between artist and audience. The possibility for ambivalence and contingency in the mindset created by the possibility of failure, given a certain resilience against the social and cultural resonance of the concept, is decisive for the experiencing of the work and, consequently, for the result.

The difference in focus which Nuttall mentions as existing between, on one hand, the actualisation by liveness of performance and, on the other hand, the hermeneutic process of recording and finishing the process in iteration rather than by the flow experienced in a live performance remains essential to process and product. Interpretation of his explanation also points to resilience as a focus against the weight of experienced fear of failure, and allows assessment of the studio situation as offering a creative process that affords the

operationalisation of failure in the first, 'hermeneutical' mode, rather than in the second, actualising mode

In another instance Nuttall's anxious 'ownership' of failure in his musical organisation nearly causes him to miss the unique contribution a 'classically trained' musician can bring to his task: to participate in the composition process. This happens when Adams suggests the quartet has revealed to him his own failure in composition, when portions of the piece have not worked out as he had anticipated. This acknowledgement of the fact of failure affords a corrective iteration in the composing process to change it. Amongst the examples of situating failure offered by Nuttall, this is the situation I have chosen to further expose in a diagram. If we retrace this as a productive failure, referring back to the intention of the composer, it would enter our schematic in the influence that he failed materiality (in Figure 2c, subchapter 3.2.1, lower triad here) has on the intention of the process (in Figure 2b subchapter 3.2.1, upper triad here), which is the basis of the interpretation by the quartet of such a new intention as it will take place in a next (rehearsed, then performed) iteration of the lower triad in the Figure below.

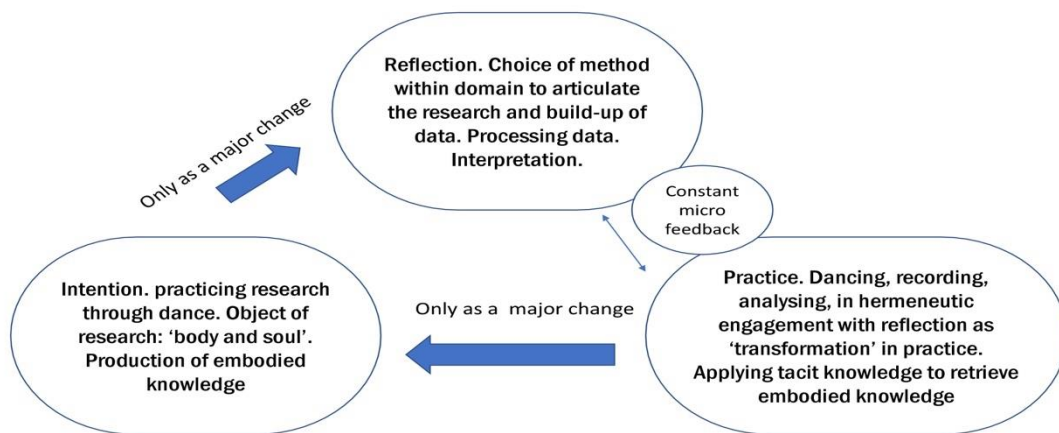


6.3.3 Suzan Tunca

In **Suzan Tunca's** practice, she performs (for) research, setting the dynamic of her performance apart from that of the other interviewees. Her practice focusses on the

physical practice itself as both site and object of her research. It is predicated on a dialogical, less discursive hermeneutics of microscopic moments of failure that drives her transformative research, which itself also focusses on a flow of short, digitally recorded segments that enable a detailed research of her movements as a reflective practice. Her search implies researching the spiritual dimension through recording the movements in short sequences, then slowly playing back the recording, to separate being and perception to look for a language that articulates this gnosis that will unite the being and the perception. It is the acknowledgement of the possibilities of this failing union which allow her to look for the gnosis that can reunite it on the conditions of her research by being understood in language, as in performance. Sara Jane Bailes proposes acceptance and use of the possibility of – here, intentional – failure to bridge the gap between the work (research) and the impossible: achieving cognition of the gnosis underlying the experience of the soul in the dance.

As with Nuttall, Tunca's practice consists partly of 'practicing', warming up, 'opening up the body', making herself available for play, subsequently producing body imagery to record and to analyse as her 'work'. There is no explicit criterion for success and failure. Here, as with Morrison, 'failure is just information'. Where Morrison's intention represents the search for a more ethical truth in the content of her writing, Tunca's research has a scientific structure and intention towards the process and the knowledge it may generate about materiality and spirituality in an embodied dialogue. Tunca's engagement with success and failure consists in commitment as the resolution of the binary they represent. Her choices, including the non-use of the term 'failure' except as signification of a physical phenomenon ('falling'), do not seem to be connected with bias.



6.3.4 Jan Deboom

Failure appears integral to the practice of Jan Deboom, as strategy as well as on a tactical level. In connection with this, he labels failure as ‘non-conformism’, a point of view that, in disengaging with the conformist reading of ‘failure’ itself, liberates him from conforming to the self-reflective, negatively signified cultural resonance of the term. However, the instability that is the result of failure situates Deboom in the centre of possibilities, unafraid of making destabilising choices, not sensing himself as being destabilised. Deboom’s ‘embracement’ of failure is found most clearly in the (non-) presentation of his work that seems to come from his ‘being in the world’ as an art where he does not always decide whether to be the artist or the work, or for his art to be his life or his practice.

Deboom’s practice consists of opening up to his own experiences to be experienced, as consequently shared with others in a moment or an event of performance that introduces them to such experiencing. It is an experiencing and participation by engagement with Deboom’s role, which seems less that of a performer, but rather that of an initiator or curator of the experience. There is an openness to contingency, instability and failure in the sense of liberating the performance from conformist expectation and values to be represented in the presentation of the performance. Deboom seems to invite the lifeworld to become his practice, and his practice is one of challenge to convention, as to a frame that houses concepts such as ‘failure’ as a value judgement. The failures in the process are the possibility of failure generating

audience engagement and the liberating possibility of failure of the performance itself, which must be negotiated by a joint effort from Deboom and his participators. Consequently, this creates a bond with his audience such as the one described by Bailes and Lehmann in Chapter 4.

The openness to paradox in thematising failure in his work is emphasised in the description of his intentionally unnoticed performances off-stage, negating such a bond. They raise questions: Is it a performance if they are unnoticed, if there is no audience? Are they a failure if the failure to communicate as performance is the intention of these performances? Are they about performance? Are they at all, in the sense of existing outside of Deboom's expectation and perception? Or are they simply vehicles to pose these questions raised by the paradox they perform, acknowledging the resonance of the poetic signification of failure as mentioned in Chapter 5?

Arguably, the best model to understand Deboom's practice in its relation to failure is found in the role of the (circus) clown, master of reality and absurdity, initiator of a discourse where all is questioned.⁷ In a sense, Deboom's rhetoric returns us to what we can define as 'transgressive inversion' in the performance of Tommy Cooper. In the work of both Cooper and Deboom, I find a potential for the disclosure of the hidden rules and conventions by inversion, meaning that the practice of both presents 'what could be characterised as the negative of a performance, in the sense that the rules of performance are systematically inverted. These rules are usually taken for granted and therefore can be considered invisible' (Bouissac 2015, 108). In the work of both, we see an inversion taking place. The difference is in the political position of his work to which Deboom subscribes, which also results in a reflexive politics of performance. Cooper, on the other hand, is part of a specifically British tradition of absurd comedy which addresses 'everyday reality' as conventionally and consensually experienced in a playfully deconstructive style, without reflection on further implications. Where the circus clown needs to reset reality in an expected final move to release the tension of

⁷ ' [...] particularly though incompetence, clowns develop performance pieces which deal with themes such as what it means to be a success (usually by repeatedly failing), and what is important in life (often the relationships we form with those around us and how we cope when we are left alone). The clown's traditional role as both an outsider and a truth-teller render him perfectly placed to comment on the interaction between individuals and the societies in which they live' (Peacock, 26).

performance for his patrons, both Deboom, as an artist, and Cooper, as an acknowledged absurdist performer, demonstrate considerably more freedom in their interpretation of the performance than is the case with the 'typical' circus clown. The circus clown is literally 'catering' to an audience in the context of a situation where he can play with expectations but needs to be careful not to break the implicit agreement between audience and entertainer.

Within the constraints of the entertainer's role, the circus clown is free to challenge and invert expectations. As a 'jack of all trades', playing instruments and performing tricks, the spectacle of his failures may outperform a 'correct' performance and establish an audience connection. Here, the vulnerability of the performer and performance potentially create a bond based on the sense of authenticity of the experience, represented in the authenticity and integrity of the actions of the experiences' curator. Presenting 'the clown', Deboom only presents himself, enabling a different positioning towards an end result and its evaluation. A sense of closure will be 'truly successful' if it not only answers questions but also specifically propagates new questions. That will be true even more so if these can be combined with the endurance to address those in further work. Due to the manner in which failure informs all stages of Deboom's practice, I argue that its reduction to a non-metaphorical model would not create more transparency, due to the complexity of the interrelatedness of the elements of his practice. It is for this same reason, however, that I return to Deboom's description of his practice in the next chapter, to illustrate the 'final' model for an overview of the operationalisations of failure in the making of art.

6.4 Recapitulation, Conclusion

- The work of Deboom depends upon failure in several ways, as illustrated. Most importantly, however, by embracing it, he also disengages from its cultural resonance by coupling it with non-conformism, which as a social stance denies failure as a negation of intention. Deboom explains failure as a predicate for a non-conformist activist stance and, as such, as an open-ended procedure to deconstruct the self-evidentiality of the everyday. He does so by failing to conform to the self-evident and by attempting to disseminate an experiential performative form of non-conformism. The only failure that he rejects without taking it up again

is his incidental failure of resilience in support of his authentic intention to be expressed through the work.

- Morrison and Tunca do not engage with failure in that way. For Morrison it is a term which articulates quality and clarity of the working process. Tunca has her own concept of process in 'transformation', as she calls the process of an arguably much more fluid hermeneutics which she describes as 'dialogue'. Although it is not crucial to her discourse, a courageous risk-taking is revealed through the ontology of her research, which I understood to be on relating the soul to the body. She undertakes her project with an inspiring dedication, however challenging the merging of its horizons might be.
- Failure is a given for Nuttall, sometimes as an adopted possibility, sometimes as a keystone in the learning process. Failure also presents him with a constraint of a specific horizon in his career regarding recording music, which he nevertheless challenges by expanding it in related directions in live performance and continuous learning.

In this chapter I have analysed and interpreted the interviewees' connections with productive failure as well as its work through constraint as the result of the experience of counterproductive failure. In the context of their praxis and the theory, approached through the models and metaphors proposed in the previous chapter, their work has emerged as predicated upon and connected with failure as presented in the three modes of failure described in the previous chapters. Based on this analysis and interpretation, I also argue their information to be sufficiently commensurable in its discussion of the object of my research to be reduced to a coherent data set. In the next and last chapter, I use these interpretations as data to answer the research questions and to create a model of artmaking that situates the various operationalisations in the making and performance of art.

7 Discussion, Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In the introduction of this thesis, I introduced the concept of productive failure in the context of artmaking and art performance and proposed several questions intended to be answered in affordance of a better understanding of the role of failure in the production and performance of art. In the first chapter of this thesis, I introduced the categories of failure and the domains in which I situate them. In the second chapter I attempted an overview and subsequent analysis of the discourse on failure in the arts, art education and hermeneutics as a process of interpretation. In the third, fourth and fifth chapters, I analysed the modes of performance that I introduced and proposed how they could be used to situate and describe failure in art practice. In the sixth chapter, I analysed four reflective contributions by artists to this discourse regarding situatedness and the role of failure to inform the return to the original questions posed by this thesis, which I attempt to answer in this last chapter. In this seventh chapter the connection of specific operationalisations of the concept failure in its three categories is further clarified in discussion, as focussed by the sub-questions that I posed in the second chapter. This is accomplished through text and diagrams to clarify the interrelatedness of this information. In the epilogue there is a final word on relevance and an acknowledgement of process, people and ideas. I begin this chapter by discussing the modes of failure as researched and connecting them to stages and aspects of the process of artmaking by answering the secondary questions posed in the first chapter.

7.2 How Does Productive Failure Work in the Making of Art After the Acknowledgement of Failure as a Fact?

Predicated on the analysis and interpretation of the discourse on hermeneutics in (A)PaR and of the artist's interviews, I argue for the mode of acknowledgement of failure, the first mode in the structure of my research, to be the prevalent working mode of failure in artmaking. In the production of art, the role of failure as a catalyst in the hermeneutic processes that are argued to be basic to the understanding of artmaking as a practice and process progressing towards fulfilment of its intention, consists in the articulation of a comparative judgement on the work as (un)finished in specific stages of making. In artmaking this is predicated on hermeneutic processes that themselves

consist of iterative movements 'to and fro', as in the definition of 'play' in the work of Gadamer (Gadamer 2004, 105). The 'to and fro' in hermeneutics can exist in the comparison and interpretation of the relation of parts to a whole; of intended completeness with the work in a stage, where it still lacks fulfilment of the maker's intention, of the dialogue of the maker with the material. A clear description of such a process can be found in the interview with Toni Morrison, as extracted in the previous chapter. As argued by Gadamer, the making of art is part of a process of 'play'. It is comparable to a game, a play with rules, where process and outcome find meaning in the artist's experience as translated into artmaking to afford a rendering of this experience as experienceable itself. Concepts such as failure and success articulate game rules of respectively good continuation and closure of the process in Gadamer's conceptualisation of 'play'. With this I argue failure to be a signifier of equal clarity of articulation to 'success', specifically in the critical description of the processes of making art.

7.3 How Does Productive Failure Work in the Performance of Art After the Acknowledgement of the Possibility of Failure?

Predicated on the analysis and interpretation of the discourse on the performing arts and of the artist's interviews, I argue for the mode of acknowledgement of the possibility of failure to be the prevalent working mode of failure in the performance of art. However, the articulatory quality of the first mode – acknowledgement of failure – also plays an important part in the preparation for theatre performance as a catalyst for the dynamic of hermeneutics in writing and scripting. Moreover, this holds true for the practice of 'rehearsal' in performing arts, also known as 'practicing', that affords the actualisation of a musical or verbatim script as a performance. Repetition and change are articulated here in the 'to and fro' of the hermeneutical process. An arguable difference might be that the performative closure of the creative process in a new worldmaking or a new revealing, mediated by the work to a percipient, takes place in the space and moment of performance, rather than in the space and time of a private viewing or reading. I propose to evaluate them as two different parts of the same artwork, where the work of failure in the first part of the process can be understood by referring to the question regarding the role of the acknowledgement of failure as a fact.

To determine where and how to apply the 'mode of acknowledgement of the possibility of failure' to understand the work of failure, it is useful to review definitions of performance as occurring in the descriptions by the interviewees. In the case of Suzan Tunca, a researcher-performer who performs her embodied research, I would argue that she performs embodied knowledge for analytical research of the performance data. The intention, however, is towards the work itself, creating an embodied transformation of knowledge by way of intending perceptions of herself and her body in movement rather than by creating an intention 'about it'. Her live work fluently articulates difference; her research divides it in sequential stages in which understandings are gained, reviewed and rejected as incomplete (failure) and appropriated into new iterations towards new and further understandings of the process in which she is maker. Her embodied work is data and she is interpreter of these data, all in one process that, by the previous description, I argue to be hermeneutic.

Concluding from the discourse represented in art and theory, the 'live' performances are actualised by the emphasis on the possibility of the unknown and are unexpected through a shared awareness between performers and audience of the possibility of failure. I have compared the situations in which the destabilisation of expectations in performance unite performers and audience in an experience as shared 'here and now' to that of the circus as a performative situation. This possibility, insecurity and instability of expectation of success or failure are specifically thematised at the circus, which, since it achieved its present form, features 'practiced failure' as a fact or possibility. In this model the audience is engaged through the excitement created onstage. In performance as an art, the destabilisation also involves the audience as abandoning their stable position as consumer of experiences in moving to a more participatory position in sharing and co-creating experience. In this involvement the engagement rises to the point where participants must question their own attitude towards 'an experience', a condition Martin Seel argues to be essential for finding an open attitude towards 'experiencing the experience' itself, which enables the individual experience 'to land' with both performers and audience (Seel 1985, 247). Furthermore, Hans-Thies Lehmann and interviewee Jan Deboom describe such a situation. Deboom even admits his unique 'real' failure in the preparation – and then failure, and then again failure to iterate – of such a situation. I would argue that the possibility of failure creates

the situation Lehmann refers to when describing theatre practice as embracing 'the whole scale of human work, activity and possibilities of expression' (Lehmann 2006, 132). I would add 'possibilities of experiencing' to this to describe more completely the liveness this affords to such a performance.

7.4 How Does the Culturally Signified Social Resonance of Failure Work in the Production and Performance of Art?

Predicated on the analysis and interpretation of the discourse in the arts themselves and of the artists' interviews, I argue for the third mode of the role of failure to understand the experience of artmaking and art performance by an individual artist as being influenced by the experience of failure through its culturally signified resonance. This mode affords a general understanding of the individual processes of the artist under this influence. When reviewing the preliminary conclusions from the data as presented at the end of the previous chapter, I find that information for answering this question has been present as a ground to the figure of the two 'active' modes throughout the interviews and their analyses. It also appears in the difference of the strength of individual resilience in dealing with the signifier 'failure'. Literature on the subject tends to have a therapeutic or fictional form or intention, for which reason I turn to the interviews for illustration. The culturally signified interpretation of 'failure', as with the responses of Nuttall, functions on an existential level, rather than in production or construction of art itself. Its results emerge as constraints, prohibitions and possibilities in the work of art. In Nuttall's case the operation of this mode is argued to create a sensitivity towards fallible circumstances that act as a constraint in the performance of art. The description I provided of the potential for bifurcation in the perception and consequent approach of the recording experience and its possible contingencies also accentuates the constraining effect imposed by the 'fear of failure'. If a performer is insecure in certain situations, or 'traumatised' by such experience, 'fear of failure' can be self-propagating, acknowledged as 'stage fright' or 'writer's block', for instance. With three of the four performing artists in these interviews being accustomed to operating under the strain of potential failure, I argue that in its most productive sense this mental state is a flexible position towards failure in performance as a phenomenon that acknowledges both the liberating side and the unnerving side of risk-taking. The importance of taking risks and admitting failure is generally positively resonant within

the larger discourse in art and science. It is also supported in word, action and practice by all four of the interviewees who provided specific data for this thesis.

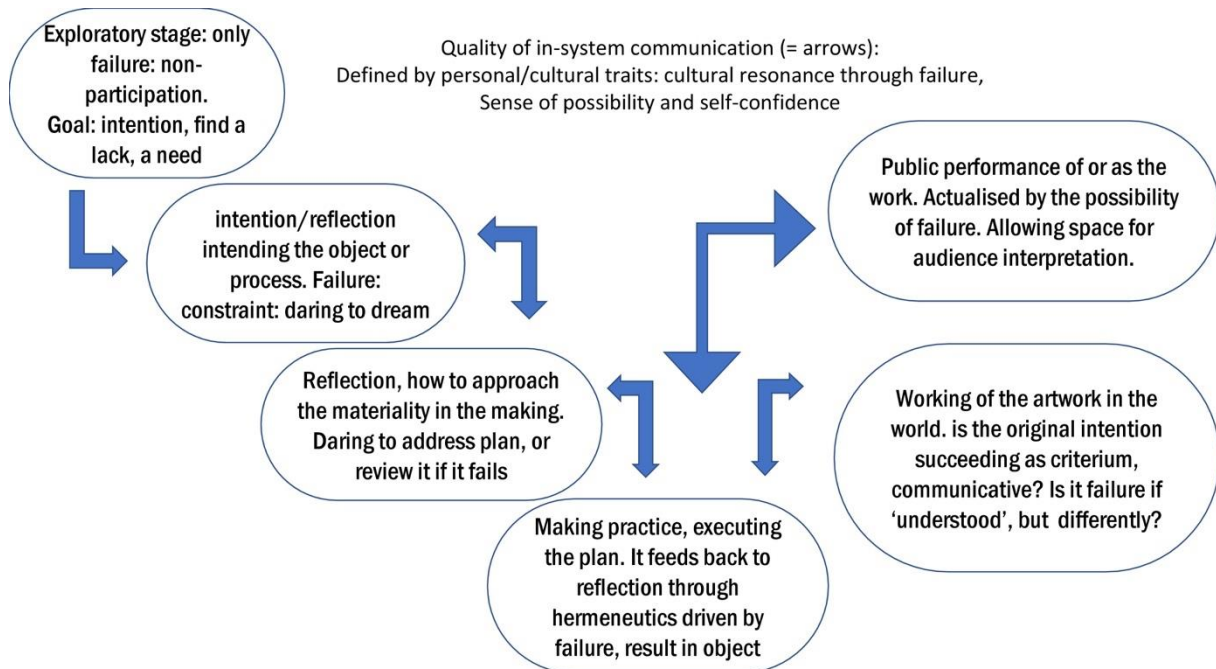
7.5 How do Productive and Counterproductive Failure Work in the Making and Performance of Art?

Because the practice of artmaking and performing consists of a complex set of processes with their own dynamic and relevance, there is not one manner in or position from which failure is operationalised or admitted in these processes. In answering the sub-questions, I have focussed on three specific modes in which failure helps to construct, actualise or constrain artmaking and performance. I discussed these modes in Chapter 1 and introduced them in my subsequent analysis of the theoretical and practical discourse as entertained in the literature as well as in the artists' interviews presented here. The way in which failure works appears contingent on the sub-domains of artmaking that I introduced in the sub-questions. I structure my answers by connecting those sub-domains and the three modes of failure into a model of their intersection that descriptively and visually answers the main question. This answer is provided in the form of two further reductions. First, I draw a descriptive conclusion, situating different modes of failure in the various processes and stages of artmaking and art performance that together comprise art practice. Practice and praxis are taken as a composed set of making processes. Failure can be argued to be at work in most of them, though in various modes, stages and manners. It is, however, more easily addressed reflectively in praxis, which implies a reflective attitude to practice itself. I note where we encounter failure, whether this mode of failure is productive and how it functions or affords functionalities that make it so. The character of the failure I emphasize is also strongly contingent on its position in the processes of making and performance. To define the work of failure, I also ask: Where and how is operationalised failure situated? I have encountered failure operationalised in the following three sites in artmaking and performance, where the performance of the work of failure is defined as specific to each site:

- In the hermeneutics of the 'material' making process, where the materiality of work interacts with reflection on and possibly the intention of the work. Failure 'productively' articulates and activates the hermeneutic 'circle of knowledge'.

- In the performance of art, by opening up the intention to the possibilities created by accepting failure. This becomes productive in creating opportunities for the performances that will operationalise the participatory potential of failure in public performance as creating performance as a site for new and unknown (interpretations of) events.
- The role of the artwork or performance as an event 'in the world', where the dichotomy of success or failure is inescapable in terms of further chances of artistic development and economic survival. Again, the success-or-failure risk factor of this reflects back on the previous steps. The availability of the artist for his work versus his sensitivity towards the possibility of social (culturally resonant) failure will decide whether this failure is a productive one or not.

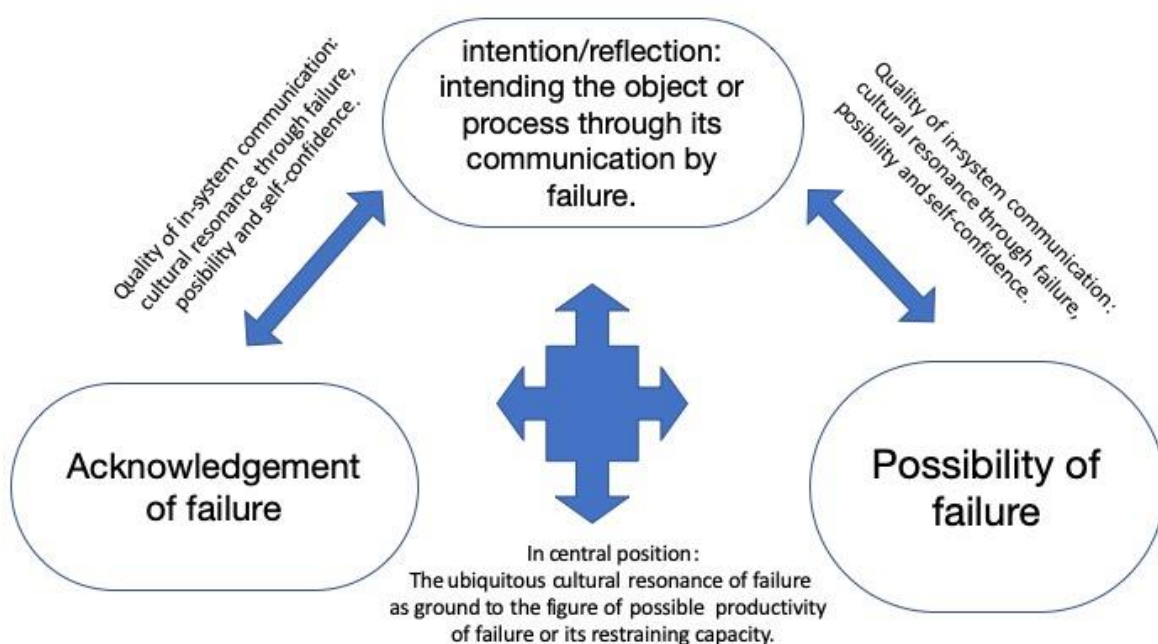
Bringing these three situations together into a single image renders the following graphic:



To answer the main question: **'How do productive and counterproductive failure work in the making and performance of art?'** I argue that failure as defined in the framework of this research works in several ways. It:

- Allows, as an unrealised but acknowledged possibility, vitalisation of art performance 'here and now', inviting contingency and participation, challenging stability and affording experiences shared between performers and audience.
- Allows for the clear articulation of action and causality of iteration in a hermeneutic creative process in art.
- Confronts artists with their (in)dependence of the binary of success or failure and the manner in which their deconstruction of this opposition by unconditional commitment, placing their artistry at stake, is conditional to the relevance and quality of their work.
- Indirectly allows for situating all art in the public, professional or academic discourse, by defining and articulating processes that create an experiential aesthetic on the basis of its intendedness as embodied in experience. In this sense I argue that failure is an important conceptual addition to the discourse on art as 'aesthetic rationality'.

The role of failure is presented here in a diagram which also indicates the sites of failure.



7.6 Epilogue

In this thesis I have situated failure as a phenomenon that performs its work on art in various modes that are productive or counterproductive to the processes of artmaking. The productive mode of acknowledgement of failure as event and fact is constructive in the hermeneutics of artmaking. The productive mode of possibility of failure engages with performance as a predicate for its actualisation and participative involvement from the side of an audience as well as the performers. The counterproductive mode of culturally signified social resonance of failure functions as a possible constraint or challenge for artmakers in the intersections of lifeworld, artist, audience and artwork. In this thesis I have argued that these three modes conceptualising failure as categories and *modi operandi* represent the most relevant roles of failure in artmaking.

Now, we return to the question of relevance. Why failure? Every process of falling and getting up, of learning by making mistakes, of trial and error, creates a chance for finding or creating something new; for finding, correlating or understanding new information, whether about walking and dancing, about conducting scientific research or about making art. Art and its creation impose a specific set of intentions, conditions and values on the work and its relation to makers and perceivers, which allows us to consider failure as an element of affordance of creative interaction. This is a reason to trace the situatedness of failure in these processes as an existential dynamic that furthers and actualises work in making and performing art. Failure, however, can also be an element in the negotiation with a possible social bias against its own resonance as abject. It proves its value by the way in which it helps to constructively deconstruct its social and cultural resonance by its thematisation in art, and, in this manner, failure contributes to the role of art and artists to pass beyond the social binary of failure or success in their individual courses of action.

'We' as embodied, perceiving selves, are also very much defined by our constructive reaction to failure in acts of world-making, which, from a phenomenological perspective, are an essential part of our consciousness of being and of 'being in the world'. I would argue for art to be a privileged source of information on the human condition. It offers an experience intended to be enjoyed as a shared experience of

being in the world, where the hermeneutic processes involved in artmaking and perception can afford the production of meaning for the maker and the perceiver, which can be understood within the perception itself. This experiencing of meaning can come from contemplation or from experiencing participation in the performance of artwork. It also can be constrained by biases, some of which reflect 'fears of failure', presenting a strain in the relationship the artist has with the experience of failure. Artists such as Jan Deboom explain the resonance of failure as, most importantly, a destructive and repressive social construct with which they wish to engage in their art. It is my intention to contribute to this engagement with failure by way of this thesis and to help move the experience of failure back into the value-free domain of falling and getting up so it can further educate us. As I have argued in this work, I believe the understanding of success may be waiting in the fold of failure.

Acknowledgements

The discourse on failure in education as entertained with ArtEZ students of the master of theatre practice has been originary to this thesis and its question. Thank you, Jan, Conrad, Mariela and Silas. Education generally has reasons for affording the creation of space to allow for doubt and reflection going beyond the success-failure paradigm. As with walking and bicycle-riding, the method of falling and getting up turns out to be a way in which much experiential and embodied learning functions. Competition and a social 'winner mentality' can have a counterproductive effect on discovery and creativity in learning. And here also, continuity in learning, discovering and the integration of new knowledge are influenced by the generation of continuity by failure and the achievement of closure in these processes by way of success.

The research process of working towards this thesis itself had many of the characteristics of discovery and construction which the hermeneutics of artmaking demonstrate and has led me along many stumbles and sideways, in the words of Toni Morrison. It could very well be described as a hermeneutic process by itself, including a reflective articulation with the help of the acknowledgement of failure(s) in the process. Even where risk-taking was intended, I learned that the cultural resonance of failure, as I have called it, to some extent always will be there for me as a background awareness and can be activated by 'stumbles' or by what I myself conceive to be failure. Through acknowledging my failure in these cases, they also offered the solution to the 'crises' they represented. I have been able to practice what I preach, and I have felt the signification of social resonance even without a community observing me, just as I have been able to brave it.

Regarding the side roads and turns, some were inspiring for a moment, some silly, some turned out to be helpful by inspiring content for writing this thesis, some ended up in the attachment of 'excess failure' as a first connection to this thesis. A 'detour' that seemed somewhat obvious from my point of view, yet was left virtually untravelled in this thesis, was music, which is my lifelong occupation. In writing this thesis it has been my choice not to mingle the writing project with insights coming from my own career in music. This was partly because of the multitude of self-evidentialities from a

lifetime in music which would have to be challenged in this context, partly because of my curiosity to use this opportunity to think with new metaphors and from new perspectives. The only exception was in mentioning two minor observations from my own practice. However, my lifelong experience of musical practice may also shine through in a melody of admiration for Suzan Tunca's 'inspiring resilience' and for Jan Deboom's courageous undertaking of a performative praxis of non-conformist authenticity, which I gratefully acknowledge, as I do the inspiration from talks on the subject with the master students and teachers of the master of theatre practice of the generation 2017-19 at ArtEZ Arnhem. Additionally, I would like express my gratitude to Dr Chiel Kattenbelt, who was my wise and patient mentor in the writing process; to Dr Frank Kessler, who provided meaningful feedback as did my wife, Dr Joy de Jong; and to Prof Dr Maaïke Bleeker as second reader and my mentor at UU.

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Attachment 1 Excess Failure

Along some side roads I encountered interesting questions relating to this thesis' subject but beyond its scope. Let me mention some of the subjects I encountered:

1)

Cross-references can arguably be found in researching interrelations between musical improvisation, which by itself knows a multiplicity of game-rules and practices, and intentional navigation in artmaking as an ecology for failure in its different levels of playing with choice-making and risk-taking. Would music possibly be methaphorised as a game of failure to:

- Use failure, as situated in artmaking, to better understand decision-making in musical improvisation?
- Use decision-making in musical improvisation to better understand failure as situated in artmaking?

2)

Would individual specifics of artists who experienced vulnerability to failure and those who experienced resilience towards failure result in any differences in individual practices, starting with the choice between making physical art objects or performing art?

3)

Would the implementation of glitches (failures of digital protocol execution) as catalysts to learning protocols (algorithms) in artificial intelligence be possible? Would it then be possible to operationalise failure as a 'positive value' in binary systems as opposite or in addition to the presently researched ternary function of 'no value given', as failure will always contain information on system operation?

4)

Would the cultural resonance of 'failure' differ between a cultural orientation towards the individual as atomic to society or an orientation towards a family, sect, clan or tribe fulfilling that part? The difference could be situated in the dualism of enlightenment of

(Western) society versus traditional non-Western cultures where cultural resonance is filtered through group processes and value systems.

Attachment 2 Transcripts of the Self-Conducted Interviews

Dance researcher **Susan Tunca** was interviewed on July 14th 2019 at Amsterdam Central Station, in the first-class waiting room. The interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Where the transcription is not performed literally, when descriptions are given, italics are used. This also applies to the second interview, conducted with Jan Deboom, a transcription of which is included here.

Noisy, sounds of T. mentioning failure and the thesis.

Susan: And then you interview artists about it?

T. talks about MTP and seeing Susan there as exemplifying academic PaR

Q: how would you describe your practice?

S: It started with dance. Then when I did the master *Artistic Research*, I started to bring in the dance practice in an academic context. It is a condition of AR that you bring in your practice. So, the transformation of the practice occurred. It always is the question of how you relate the academic type of knowledge generation to the non-verbal experiential dimensions of, in my case, dance. During the master it still was separated, I felt that dance does not need this academic dimension of reflection and research. I thought of that as independent. So, there was no direct influence from one sphere to the other. Then I went into a phase of continuous transformation embedding my practice in DAS, where there is much emphasis on practice, but also very much embedded in an AR project. So, since 2013 I am gradually transforming my practice in dialog with artistic research.

Q) I remember the phrasing of your ambition for you master project as 'bridging epistemologies'. Is this something which you have carried over into your PHD?

S) There is still a lot to gain in that dialog, but of course methodology and questioning in academic context are very different. I believe, however that both can be significant to each other. Dance practice needs to articulate its content and AR needs to open up its questionings and methodologies.

Q) So, body and dance are connected to the content and research to structure?

S) No, I would not separate that. I think in order to make that dialog possible I think that dance needs to be able to articulate its content verbally and AR needs to open up its questionings and methodologies.

This is not necessarily about hermeneutics and interpretation but also about the possibility of hypotheses. It is about generating types of seeing through the practice. The written part is not just exegesis or interpretation of all the other levels of knowledge interpretation, but of course your focus is (different?)

Q) Thanks for putting me straight. Another question: how did you come to look for the soul in the body?

S) Terminology and different meanings in different contexts: The soul can be embedded in a theological context. In a secularised society it does not even exist anymore, maybe as 'psyche'. Yet in dance: if there is no soul, there is no dance, almost as a criterion, also in music.

T) *Explains 'el alma' in the double bass and the name 'double'.*

Q) Interesting body analogy, so the bass has a solar plexus. In academics, if I tell a scholar I want to search for the soul they say: you have to study Descartes. However, in dance we experience, and how can you experience the necessity for the soul? And yet I study it in an academic context where it is dead, always. It is mostly a way of keeping 'on track'. And then of course everything belongs to each other, so...

Q) And is it not science's task to untwine it?

S) Ja, in a way you start analysing, to partialize or segment things. But AR is also work in the studio. Do things and then find words. It implies a different 'economy of dance', opening up to other people, explaining, speaking about it. With traditional dance and critics giving feedback, there is no relation with the process. In PaR people know your process, where you come from so there is a different kind of feedback...

T) How do (segments of) this process start: one starts moving, or one starts moving to a question?

S) You have to have a question. The writing is practice, the theory is practice.

T) Yes, and in that context a specific question: how do you situate yourself in that practice? How do you relate to it?

S) I do have a solid self that is in the practice but is also created through creating the practice. I do not see myself as a fixed identity, you understand.

T) I relate to it through being myself in the practice of music. How do you apply and consider knowledge in this context, embodied, tacit....

S) I try to find the process of articulating a perspective, epistemologically it is embodied knowledge I am working with/looking for rather tacit knowledge: how to ride a bike, kind of.... It is there in learning a phrase and [in] being able to repeat it without 'thinking'. For another layer of knowledge, I go to the unconscious, not knowing.

T) How do you bracket the (tacit) knowledge you have in order not to be defined by it. To get 'under it'. (*explains*)

S) I have sort of transformed it towards the tuning of the dancing body as/towards an instrument of research. Yet my dancing body is heavily biased by all kinds of inscription, dance language, so to say. so how do I articulate knowledge with my body that is not just a repetition of some other language. You can neutralise the body-mind, I try to access deeper layers, so that is really not repetition. But, of course I cannot exclude all other factors.

T) So, going 'into practice' for a day, part of this will be warming up, part will be getting below the level of self-evidence of your physical activity? Do you retrieve knowledge from beyond?

S) I work with musical composition, a composer working on Bach's chaconne. The unpredictability of this arrangement makes me drop into other modes of movement, which works into retrospective dance-writing, a method that is emerging, so I create and record [on] video segments of 9 seconds and slow it down in playback and write what is happening and write it down. Both on the body-level and intentional level, what is happening at the level of body-mind, what is happening with the psycho-physical entity. When I dance this will always be semi-unconscious. Recording makes it possible to engage with the text of the body.

T) So, this also is a way to distance yourself from the experience.

S) It is a possibility to document the work from the inside out, it makes it possible to enter into dialog with this. For myself, but also about it with the reader of the text. From this dialog comes knowledge.

T) Does your research have a goal? What would I be able to learn talking with you ten years from now? Is there a direction?

B) the knowledge I search for is 'gnosis', (another type of knowledge from learning to dance, tacit knowledge). Spiritual insights through the dancing body. It is my goal that the language itself propels me towards that. the artistic object becomes an epistemological tool or object (to enter the epistemological dimension.) So, for me

not-knowing is not 'the way'. In the unknown I search for a specific kind of knowing through the dancing. It is almost always retrospectively I can find it. I think it's there, but of course it can grow forever (the knowledge, pres.) I try to construct a system of being, where the dance is a vessel for me to continue on that path. And then I communicate the poses.

T) So, there is a certain search for truth. Is this truth ultimately best expressed in the dance itself or in the whole of the research and documentation it sets in motion?

S) It resonates in all these directions. I cannot claim truth. I can search for it. I can generate epistemologies. Interesting, the dynamics of the process. (*silence*)

T) Does your work imply constraints and/or failures? The body is limited in its way to navigate space.

S) Always we find limitations, every day you have to start again. The body has the tendency to shrink, so every time I have to open it up. So, you (again?) have an instrument with space inside that can resonate. That plays a crucial role in the constriction of that materiality. You play with it and open possibilities. With limitations that you are always adapting to and compensating for. Taking what is given: the body, gravity, space, time, sound.

T) I recall you referring (*during an ArtEZ seminar*) to research as constraining things and art as drawing them out.

S) Yes, that is an interesting dialog. Looking for truth [to find] the seed you can put into art.

T) Constraining the reality of the body into words?

S) Yes, now you come into the ontology of language, which constrains reality. Maybe not even the word itself, but the printing of it. 'Small letters'. The constraint may not be in language but in the use of it.

T) This is also about how you use language in your research?

S) Even if I use different segments in retrospective dance-writing, relative to the segments the writing, the language, changes. This happens spontaneously, and I have to figure out how to deal with that difference.

T) Returning to my thoughts on failure. I tend to think of it as creating possibility for change, announcement also of this [happening in] possibility, event, acknowledgement]. Does this resonate?

S) Totally. I do not make it a topic in my research but it is very much present. It forces you to adapt to what is possible, it is a test. What helps me to continue is

context, rather than just having a practice. DAS is a strong support. But in the practice, catching and falling, in the micro-level it happens every time. Failing, compensating failures. Learning to reduce falling/failing, words that are somehow related.

T) If you think of practice, continuation, what do you think of? Your biography shows a switch from an active performance career (as a dancer) to an academic research career. Did this change your involvement with dance? How do you see this after acquiring your PHD?

S) I see myself as a researcher and a performing artist. The dissertation comes from the practice. I still practice dance as such but much less than before. In my studio I do a performance that is, at the same time a research I still think AR is a nice reference for teaching and coaching, where it is mostly used.

T) I would be interested to see whether it has survival value 'outside of school', outside of teaching.

S) Yes, this is really a question of the market and the mentality. The current landscape of dance in the theatres is not yet open for it. You need audience numbers.....

T) *Vaguely talking on AR.* Does artistic research [as investigating] form and content, result in an artistic product or in data?

S) I think both approaches apply, I see my research results embodied in the art works. There will be reflection, but primarily the knowledge should be embedded in the artwork. Maybe it is better to let go of this binary process-product. Performance is a moment in time or a marker in the process. Of course, the performance can be more. I can perform a question. If I do so two years later it may still be a question, but [by then] it has evolved a lot. My personal tendency towards searching is that I let it get too fluffy, it gets too vague. Combining the two

S) It is a long time endeavour in academia, a very heady environment.

S. asks after T's working job at UCU, T explains.

Jan Deboom was interviewed in his living room in Gent on august 28 2019. The language in which the interview was conducted was a combination of Dutch (author) and Flemish (Deboom). The English version was created with the aid of Google Translate.

Q) Whose 'failure' has inspired you the most?

J) (That of) A good friend of mine. He actually had a very special way of not succeeding in life, something like that. Not being conformist and thus really ... failing. not getting your needs under control. Poorly attuned to the environment and life, with dying as the ultimate failure.

Q) In what way has he been inspiring?

J) I spent a lot of time with him, he died. It was actually my best friend. You do end up in a whole context where you do things in a different way. It happens to you, how do you deal with it? You come into a situation and you (re)act in an abnormal way. Then people get a very strange image of you. For example, if you give someone a tip of fifty euros, or give your I-phone away. By doing things like that you create situations where nobody really knows what to do, how to respond.

Q) There was a rationality to this?

J) A certain dissatisfaction with how things are going generally. I have had some friends who did very abnormal things. Impulsive, [as when] you go by your instinct and then you see. With jazz it could be that way. And [there is] the practical side of performance, to view things as if everything is performance.

T) Could you say that his life was a work of art?

J) He was one of those people who see the days of their lives as potential, something can be made of it.

T) Successful failures ... that requires courage.

J) And coincidences, just like I now play in a piece with my girlfriend in the big theatres, coincidences, that nevertheless cause questions, for example with your intentions and by introducing chance.

Then we also come back to improvisation, one of the most important things in my work. I don't always manage to find a format.

T) Would it be improvisation if you always succeeded?

J) You learn from it. It is like the idea of a trial for a performance. I still try to find my way in it, in dance. I think that improvisation should give the opportunity to come into the here and now. Also, to generate some kind of fun. In dance that is sometimes aestheticized, bypassing this goal. Another problem here and now is that improvisation is stylized, you hear yourself back and things are petrified. What also seems necessary is something / someone to play against. As I understand, your friend liked to play in the social space, so that it is also automatically a joint thing. To

return to the petrification: the mirror seems risky to me, while sitting in every dance rehearsal room. You also see yourself with the eye of the other. Improvising with other people while giving each other space, that is just as well. We determine and limit each other automatically, I think. (*More about dancers and impro*).

Q) How do you experience failure in the presentation of what you do?

J) With my own work, for example?

T) Yes, where doing and being become one thing.

J) Think about it. I like that I am researching or making. In the 'commercial' artworld you have to know beforehand what you are going to do, what will it be and what will it look like. I myself am often just at work and then something comes out that is opposite to my goal and expectation: I find that freedom (as part of the process) important to integrate. But the way I work [is]: I start and I don't know where I will end up. In that sense it is already failing, at least for some people. [I think] it mainly fails to meet expectations. That in itself raises questions. Am I actually an artist or maybe I am doing something else? The ability to ask that question is essential to me, while (in mainstream art?) You shouldn't be doing that. That's how it feels. In principle, such expectations are expressed. In my final presentation of the recent master's program [at ArtEZ, as part of the *Master Theatre Practice*) it was also said that I had to play out my strengths more, also a slight form of censorship. I myself am very keen on a kind of investigation that looks incredibly clumsy and amateurish. But nevertheless, you clearly follow a certain route. That is my way of working, actually unsuccessful, in the sense that I sometimes do things that nobody notices. That was with the presentation of drawings (*demonstrated prior to the conversation and used in performance*). No one saw or understood the drawings, no one also understood that I was performing while I was not performing, but finding the balance between performing and not performing, which I find an interesting boundary. You disappear into a haze of obscurity and nobody notices that your performance is under way, which can be experienced as a powerful statement, as I prefer to see it myself (which does not mean that I always like to see myself [working this way], sometimes I really think that it is not good, or not properly placed, that it does not come across). My interest lies in those kinds of ambiguities and overlaps. Artist / not artist, [whether] something is / is not a performance,

T) Is this about answers or about other ways to ask your questions? You choose to work in an atmosphere of what you previously [*before the interview*] called

'craziness', which in the present description also means that even the fact of your performance can go unnoticed. Does that also lead to thinking about it and perhaps giving a qualification of something as clearly 'failed'?

J) I still find the ideas I am trying to be valuable so I keep using them. [They are] about presentation that it communicates to the outside world. I often thank that the things that I do - because they happen between things - often do not work in a traditional/usual format. If I perform, it must be an entire evening. Not then ten minutes, then again. I can't build up anything in ten minutes, that will only work on an entire evening. In ArtEZ I have [missed the time for] the things that I actually do, or find interesting to get started with. To make something else out of it, or really make it clear that something has changed after my intervention. Then I ask myself: is this correct? I have to work with what is simply more expensive, makes more sense. That is often less focused on spectacle. It can be spectacular, but it depends on for whom, of course.

T) 'Unspectacular' often needs a spotlight to work theatrical, as a focus. You now leave a lot of responsibility to the audience

J) What you just say about the people, the public (*silence*) The audience is actually part of the work and should not be 'anonymous' and continue after ten minutes. That happens with most people. But for an experience you have to be more immersed in it. A kind of formula that I work with now, that works best for me to make my own 'operation clear.

T) Do you also have a specific intention, something that you would like to bring about?

J) I think I want to put them in a different world. Other goals are slightly more long-term, not immediately achievable. I then have an audience with which I want to create a kind of awareness that makes them count in the process in a different way, no longer as an audience. Their audience role has been diluted when they are actually becoming an interactive group of people instead of an audience. Those are things that I find really important because I really see them as that and experience it as relevant. The step between audience and performer, in which we become a group. In which everyone is right and has a share. I ended up no more than others. That is an idea that I would like to bring out but the practice: start with it.

T) Have you consciously developed strategies for it? Or should that also happen on the itself?

J) Yes, try ... and especially resign if it doesn't work. For example, in my last performance in which I really created something from 'we are a group'. I did have some strategies to do that, but ... I actually missed the audience during the entire rehearsal period. In the real practice of 'now let's become a group. With the audience there (suddenly), the step becomes too large, my experience too small, to create that immediately. Then you do not fully achieve your actual plan., But it becomes more for the longer term or so. That is then a real failure.

T) Your description evokes the word / concept of 'intimacy' with me (*illustrates with improv, chamber music*). From there I also can imagine the challenge and the reward.

J) I think you don't make it easy for yourself by putting yourself in every time. I resigned myself to that. I also acted while I was sick, pretending everything was ok. [when] Sick you are at an extreme. You do really serious things. You notice that you use yourself all the time to (*silence*) you commit yourself. I find it interesting to see yourself faltering, those are interesting moments. I can also enjoy a kind of professionalism, really standing under difficult circumstances. Sometimes I had a big fight with the choreographer and then on stage. Then you perform again, those are those moments ... I can enjoy a good performance and also a visible, honest vulnerability. That also makes it very intimate. That is also an exercise to give that vulnerability a place.

T) Does the possibility of failure also play a role in the situation?

J) Yes, that is difficult, it is super interesting, you want to remain, but you do not know if. It only happens when you give it up.

T) tells story of appreciation by colleague: "when you are tired you play most smoothly."

J) I also worked with choreographers who like to exhaust people before they come on stage. To create a kind of shakiness. I also play a part in this: destabilizing the situation in order to have to improvise.

T) To surrender to instability?

J) That's it just it. If you can deal with that instability, it gives a very stable feeling. I manage to stand in that turmoil and instability. That gives - paradoxically - a sense of control.

T) Another question: do you know a better word for failure?

J) Potential. By allowing failure, there is much more potential. The opposite is that failure is not allowed and a taboo. Another word would be limited versus unlimited potential, in the last case if you give a place to failure.

T) What strikes me, for example, is that in writing the use of the word 'failure' seems easier than in conversation. In conversation, the voice brings the word closer to the skin. In writing - external language - the word seems to be used more easily. All connotations in the dictionary are negative. It is quite merciless as a kind of scalpel in articulation of what is going on. I didn't realize that difference yet. I found myself also sensitive to it.

J) People's reactions to my telling about my work are often: "Oh poor you work with failure, how terrible." Compassion.

T) *Mentions the use of the use as dancing on a limp cord using socially failed music heroes (jazz) he grew up idolising as example.*

J) Absolutely. It takes away a lot of energy from people who do not want to or cannot allow themselves to fail. My girlfriend is still young, she is making a piece (for touring with the ballet group led by Krisztina De Châtel) and everything has to be fine. It must not be too good, not too controversial. It must really fit into it, it must be correct. It cannot fail. That is especially important. Then you are heading in a specific direction that I cannot support. It is a kind of training, technique that you learn. I also see the benefit of it. But those are the places that do not allow for failure

T) Can you explain?

J) Well, then you get a very correct society, I think. Very conformist. Another word for failure could actually be non-conformist.

T) Do you mean non-conformism as a condition for accepting failure? So, it is also about how people experience 'failure', non-conform behaviour.

T) While for us the (learning process) often stops with success.

J) Another word: learning as connected with failure. There is little room for failure and recognition for this in 'mainstream' art.

T) Also, with the new more academic curriculum of ArtEZ, where other criteria and goals apply.

J) I feel that a year and a half of my studies were really pure learning, only towards the end there was also a demand to deliver something, to complete something. Which of course is a shame, because you no longer learn so much in that final phase. Then you also take fewer risks. I can absolutely imagine that I will

continue with, for example, the drawings, the work that I am doing now and nobody will look back, but that it is still a useful step for me to follow. I can absolutely imagine that I will not be successful with that, nobody looks at it, but I think that does not bother me. I am glad that I am not at the point that I think: gosh, I would like to end up there and achieve something. That is quite a relief!

T) So, the final judgment lies with you. Maybe within an intimate conspiracy with the audience?

J) I also think it is fantastic to open a place in Brussels where learning is central. If that is drawing with the people who come there, it seems fantastic to me. A way to go further.

Whether that will be something successful is not relevant at all. I find myself in a difficult position with the employers in Belgium, because I am not always satisfied, but still have work again. I skipper in between. They expect from my Brussels plan a fully developed concept of a foundation that can also receive a subsidy. I like to watch that, but for the same money none of it ends up. That seems predictable, but perhaps there are people who believe and support this, without looking at it economically, but well: you need a model that works, then we support it.

T) What influence does thinking about failure have on you?

J) Only positive. If I notice failure in someone's performance, it is actually always because and which makes it interesting Conrad (fellow ArtEZ student), for example, proposed a movie two years ago, virtual reality, in which he and his girlfriend danced. Something had gone wrong with the recording. Files had been partially cut, everything had gone wrong. We looked, and at a certain point the image jumped, not correct. When things went wrong, from the moment it broke, beautiful moments came, exciting, enriching, which is how I experience failure, as a kind of fertilizer.

T) Failure as a teacher? Any tension that translates, well-articulated, into a relaxation, will ultimately work. Failure creates a kind of tension, unexpectedness and requires dealing with it.

J) Certainly in music, voice, the new program I am making also contains a 'bachanal' chord (dissonant). I once experienced a screeching workshop. Not really a lot of wrong screaming, a little more aesthetic. But you could not fail, even error might be right.

T) If you are the only one who knows what it is meant for, can't it be wrong in the other's ear? Tension is important

J) Yes, how close can you get to that limit. The public wants that too. But then not fail, to the edge, not over it.

T) And on stage, costume drama, realistic to that time, but not for us, here, now, etc. then there is nevertheless an agreement like in child's play, that it is just like real.

That tension can also break, but that is also part of creating worlds, just like 'playing outside', you determine the rules of the game, you agree on them and you keep the magic by keeping you as if jet is real. There are many appointments on stage. In a classical concert, for example, people do not jump onto the stage, in a pop concert perhaps. There are all kinds of unspoken agreements. Actually, this is also the case with words. 'failure, scares many people, because of all the negative connotations. It becomes a word that people do not want to think too much about, become restless, get along with in the stomach, even in music where you do not even name a lot as a non-maker.

J) I am now also really deleting language. All words that refer to responsibility, and things that more or less speak about some kind of control that you have. I want to create a kind of (un) conscious. A kind of play with it.

T) Fun: responsibility and control: anti-failure. A moment of courage is needed to give up control and to accept the possibility of failure.

J) Control, that's what it's about

T) That exists by grace of letting go. Shall we leave it at this?