Feed-back, feed-forward: towards meaningful exchange on artistic work in doctoral supervision

An analysis of experiences of artistic feedback and indications for the integration of artistic feedback practices in doctoral supervision.

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Contents

Introduction

This document outlines the work and findings of *The Art of Feedback*, a project conducted by the Orpheus Institute, Ghent, in the context of the Erasmus+ strategic partnership *Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates. The Art of Feedback* aims to improve artistic feedback[1] in doctoral supervision. It does so by: (1) collecting ideas and experiences on the interaction taking place between artistic work[2] – PhD candidate – supervisor(s), and (2) disseminating approaches and strategies for the conduct and integration of artistic feedback in doctoral supervision. Being able to share knowledge and ideas and critically challenge one's artistic work with others is vital in the development of a fruitful artistic doctoral research project. To realise the potential of such a project, it must be possible to directly, constructively and jointly address the work at its heart. Doing so requires the building of a relationship of trust which is at the centre of a complex network of dynamics – of context and comprehension, of language, expectation, empathy, degrees of consensus, and honesty. Supervisor and supervisee together establish a common practice of critique, which must itself remain open to reflection and development, and which functions within both an institutional framework and the wider context of the particular artistic practice. Satisfactory artistic feedback practices enable students to better articulate, understand and develop their work within the scope of the doctoral project. We hope that this document and its associated materials will serve to bring focus to a lively, urgent and ongoing discussion.

Observations in recent work

In recent years, artistic doctoral supervision has been at the foreground of several transnational projects, events and publications[3]. An increased awareness of problematic areas provides a route to the implementation of practices and facilities that are better tailored to specific needs of artistic doctoral candidates, supervisors, administrators and doctoral staff. Surprisingly, the artistic feedback processes central to doctoral supervision have not yet received appropriate and wide-ranging attention and inquiry. In what follows we articulate five observations on artistic feedback in doctoral supervision brought to the attention by a handful of publications available on the topic.

The nature of artistic work is often non-discursive, embodied and/or creative, which is complementary to traditional modes of knowledge production in academia. Gedin (2015) points out that non-artist supervisors, mainly with an academic background, tend to focus on text instead of the artistic work. As a result they remain unacquainted with the research project as a whole. In '*The Visual Arts Practice PhD in Ireland: An interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*' (2018) 13 participants describe their experiences as Visual Arts Practice (VAP) PhD candidates in Ireland. The VAP PhD candidates feel that non-artist supervisors fail to appreciate and/or understand the role of practice and artistic work within the research project, resulting in overlooking the work and focusing on text. VAP PhD candidates point out that the lack of exchange on artistic work occurs mainly in interaction with supervisors not familiar with artistic practices (Halvey, 2018). Within this particular context, the lack of exchange on artistic work is perceived by the VAP PhD candidates

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1 In this paper *artistic feedback* is used as an umbrella term to describe the act or process of addressing artistic work in doctoral supervision.

2 Artistic work in this text refers to any kind materialized form of art, at any stage in the process: a verbalized idea or expression, a (part of a) performance, outcomes of an artistic experiment, an installation, an art object, a recording of the work, etc.

3 E.g. Transnational European projects for 3rd cycle arts research and education such as SHARE (sharenetwork.eu), ADiE (www.artisticdoctorates.com), events such as the annual SAR International conference on Artistic Research (societyforartisticresearch.org), publications such as the anthology '*Acts of Creation*' (Henrik Frisk, Karin Johansson, & Lindberg-Sand, 2015) and *Supervising Practice: Perspectives on the supervision of creative practice higher degrees by research* (Hamilton & Carson, 2015).

as problematic, since one of the dominant motivations for undertaking a PhD is the expectation to enrich and advance one's artistic practice. VAP PhD candidates "sought a deepened critical and theoretical understanding of their oeuvre arrived at through critical feedback" (Halvey, 2018, p. 227). More specifically, **most VAP PhD candidates yearn for quality critical feedback, lively engaged discussions and critical discourse around the artistic work**.

The emphasis on discursive work and ignorance of artistic work in the VAP context seems to be related to the (non-artistic) background of supervisors. However, in The Act of Creation, Johansson (2015) points out that **supervisors often lack helpful practices and discourse to give feedback and evaluate artistic doctoral work**. The participation of supervisors with a similar artistic background to that of the supervisee could enhance productive dialogue, but not by definition.

Compared to other non-practice-based research traditions, artistic doctoral candidates are often established artists. "As established artists enter research environments, the active reality of the supervisory relationships can more often encompass complex levels of attainment where a candidate (as well as the supervisor) can be simultaneously expert and novice" (Bacon and Midgelow, 2019, p. 15). **PhD candidates, supervisors and peers might have equally successful careers, which can result in complex and untraditional relationships** (Johansson, 2015).

On top of possible complex and untraditional relationships, **formal and specific training in artistic research areas for supervisors in artistic research remains underdeveloped**. Of the 51 supervisors represented in 'Experiences and perceptions of the Artistic Doctorate: A survey report' 48% feel as if they not have had enough training to be able to fruitfully supervise artistic PhD candidates (Midgelow, 2017). General supervisor training can potentially be valuable, but does not cover the particular challenges that supervisors within artistic disciplines are faced with (Jullander, 2015).

Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates: work-package The Art of Feedback

To be able to have a more meaningful exchange on the artistic work and processes, would create an environment that is more adapted to the hybrid, cross-disciplinary practices often met in the context of artistic research. Improving dialogue between PhD candidate and supervisor/peers that is not based on text only but rather on the understanding and elaboration of artistic processes, will allow supervisors and PhD candidates alike to better articulate the object(s) of research. Also, an improved understanding of artistic feedback and the integration of new discourses into the curricula of artistic PhD programs will lead to better practices of evaluation and approaches to student assessment.

Considering the similarities between the work of artists and artist-researchers, one might think the integration of strategies for artistic feedback into artistic-research programs, and into doctoral supervision processes in particular, is a potential asset for the future of artistic research. However, doctoral work in artistic research does not only include the process of art-making, but also other modes of conducting research, with both aspects eventually interconnecting. We believe it's important to look for ideas and insights on artistic feedback within the framework of the artistic doctoral context.

Within the scope of the project The Art of Feedback, we make strategies for feedback on artistic work available for supervisors and others to use. Two significant events are associated with The Art of Feedback and have highlighted the enthusiasm and need for community around the topic. Those events are *Community of Practice - The Art of Feedback and Feed-back, feed-forward: approaches to artistic feedback in doctoral*

supervision.

The **Community of Practice – The Art of Feedback** came to being in December 2019 to facilitate dialogue on artistic feedback among supervisors, PhD candidates and others involved in doctoral supervision. The Orpheus Institute launched a call for participants to which 100+ people responded from different artistic research areas and countries. In the first online discussion on December 3rd 2019, 44 members from the Community of Practice (CoP) attended and shared their experiences and ideas on artistic feedback in doctoral supervision.

The topics emerging from the discussion expressed the need for specific supervisory training, better PhD candidate preparation and better understanding of the role and organisation of artistic feedback in doctoral supervision.

The Multiplier Seminar **Feed-back, feed-forward: approaches to artistic feedback in doctoral supervision** took place online in November 2020. The two-day seminar was organized by the Orpheus Institute in the framework of the strategic partnership Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates. 60 doctoral supervisors from all artistic research areas were invited to explore artistic feedback approaches and experience through online presentations, workshops and discussions led by experts in the field.

The topics that emerged paralleled those of the discussions of the Community of Practice. Supervisors, often working in small numbers, expressed a clear thirst for such exchange. Despite the personal nature of encounters in artistic research and the uniqueness of every situation – axiomatically so, one might imagine – some useful common threads emerged and began to take clearer form.

Looking at the publications and the topics emerging from both the Community of Practice and the Multiplier seminar, it becomes evident that artistic feedback in doctoral supervision needs urgent attention. Within the project timeframe we carried out a number of in-depth interviews with actors working in artistic doctoral supervision. This document is the main outcome of that inquiry and consists of the (1) the methodological approach to collecting ideas and experiences, (2) an articulation of main challenges, perspectives and behaviors regarding artistic feedback in doctoral supervision, and (3) a roadmap where we distill a series of broad indicators that seem to reflect a consensus view on useful components that can lead to constructive exchange as well as strategies to actually address artistic work. Accompanying materials are to be found on the project webpage. These materials consist of the resources collected throughout the project, such as recordings and descriptive accounts of the material disseminated in the Multiplier seminar and other references for artistic feedback in doctoral supervision.

Relying upon data collected from these shared experiences, the Art of Feedback articulates a space for future dialogue and inquiry. It is hoped that this document and accompanying materials will make a meaningful contribution to what has emerged through the project to be a topic of wide interest among supervisors and candidates alike.

Methods

Collecting data with qualitative interviewing

Qualitative interviewing, both unstructured and semi-structured, allows us to understand how interviewees give meaning to events or phenomena (Bourgeault, Dingwall, & de Vries, 2010) and to collect substantial information on perspectives and behaviours (Bryman, 2015).

Research Questions:

> 'How and when is artistic work addressed in artistic doctoral supervision?'
>
> 'How do supervisors, PhD candidates and others involved in the doctoral context describe the role and meaning of artistic feedback?'
>
> 'What are the general conditions and requirements for engaging and efficient feedback processes of non-discursive work in an artistic doctoral context?'

Interviewees were PhD candidates and supervisors in artistic research. Some fulfilled multiple roles and if relevant were interviewed accordingly[4]. Multiple institutions in different artistic research areas were selected. Some interviewees were actors we encountered through artistic research events or within the Orpheus Institutes' network; other interviewees were selected on the basis of internet research and practical considerations. 20 interviews were carried out face-to-face, mostly in the interviewees' main institution for higher education in artistic research. Four interviews were carried out online due to travel restrictions in spring 2020. All 24 interviews were conducted between May 2019 and June 2020.

We conducted interviews with actors affiliated with institutions in Belgium, The Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Denmark. Within a one-year period and with one interviewer, we reached eight European institutions of higher education in artistic research, thus ensuring a diverse cultural context for this study. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed. If recording was not possible, we kept substantial notes during the interview and added details within 24 hours after the interview took place.

From unstructured to semi-structured interviewing

The first six interviews were unstructured and helped us identify themes that occur when addressing the notion of artistic feedback. The approach to unstructured interviewing is to present interviewees with open questions and react on points that appear worthy to follow up (Bryman, 2015). Examples of such questions: 'Could you describe how artistic work is addressed in doctoral supervision? ', 'Can you take me to a situation where artistic work was presented and how you commented afterwards?'.

Interviewees described their answers by first stating how other factors influence the process of giving and receiving artistic feedback. Main factors were the institutional framework, supervision roles, perspectives on the role of artistic work, perspectives and behaviours on addressing artistic work and personal criteria of meaningful artistic feedback processes.

These factors helped us prepare an interview guide for the following semi-structured interviews. An interview

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4 Some supervisors were also head of the PhD program or director of research, providing a helicopter view of the institutional framework. Other supervisors could recall their experience as PhD candidates. Some PhD candidates also fulfilled tasks such as collaborating with one of their supervisors or organizing doctoral seminars.

guide is a list of questions or topics to be covered during the semi-structured interview (Bryman, 2015). Semi-structured interviews enable comparison between cases as similar questions and themes are addressed.

Interview guide

1. **Institutional framework**: ask about the structure and organization of the artistic doctoral program (admission requirements, dissertation requirements, benchmark evaluations and assessment, ...).

2. **Supervision roles**: ask about formal and informal supervisory activities, meaning assigned to the notion of supervision, formal expectations, ...

3. **Perspectives on the role of artistic work** in the doctoral research project and within the research culture of the research environment.

4. **Perspectives and behaviors on addressing artistic work** in different settings and doctoral phases.

5. **Criteria of meaningful artistic feedback processes** in artistic doctoral supervision (existing and/or desired criteria).

Every semi-structured interview started with an introduction by the interviewer, making sure the interviewee understands the purpose of the interview and research project. Oral consent was given to use the material collected anonymously for the purpose of this project.

After the more formal introduction, interviewees would often spontaneously start talking about the topic and how it relates to their specific context. On the one hand, the flexible nature of the interviews allowed us to observe how the interviewee frames and understands the topic. On the other hand, the interview guide allowed us to cover all the themes and collect substantial information.

Thematic analysis of the data

From reading to labeling to comparison and contextualization

Texts such as transcriptions, interview summaries and field notes were first read in their entirety. This generated side notes. A second reading looked more closely at the structure and the paths interviewees would take to describe the role of artistic feedback. A third step was to identify recurring themes between interviews and assigning labels to textual fragments. To generate valuable labels we made use of Lofland, Lofland, and Lofland's (1995) considerations. To name a few: what general category is this item of data an instance? What does this item of data represent? What sort of answer does this item of data imply? What are people doing? What do people say they are doing?

Besides assigning labels to textual fragments and summarizing individual narratives, we color coded statements as described below. This last approach to organizing and analyzing data helped us focus on the statements on artistic feedback.

Color coded textual fragments that describe;

- ▶ Situations in which the artistic work is not addressed,
- ▶ Situations in which the artistic work is addressed,
- ▶ How is the artistic work addressed? What are actors doing while addressing the work?
- ▶ Challenges of supervision concerning the act of giving feedback on artistic work,
- ▶ Institutional challenges concerning the act of giving feedback on artistic work,
- ▶ How is feedback given? Factors, behaviors, settings, ...,
- ▶ How is feedback in art (in general) described?
- ▶ Expressions of what the actors identify as ideal requirements for artistic feedback,
- ▶ Peer feedback characteristics,
- ▶ What it takes to implement feedback 'cultures' into doctoral programs or PhD groups,
- ▶ Candidates initiatives for feedback on artistic work.

Narrative of this document

In '**The art of talking about art in doctoral supervision**' we delineate statements on frequency of artistic feedback and exploratory statements. In '**Critique, exchange, dialogue, what's in a name? Role and meaning of artistic feedback in doctoral supervision**' we take a closer look at various understandings of artistic feedback by interviewees. '**Roadmap towards meaningful exchange on artistic work**' articulates considerations on different levels for the integration of artistic feedback in doctoral supervision.

Artistic feedback in doctoral supervision

The art of talking about art in doctoral supervision

86% of the interviewees expressed the opinion that artistic feedback in doctoral supervision comes with challenges.

When is artistic work not directly addressed and artistic feedback experienced as problematic by PhD candidates and supervisors?

(No) need to talk about it: PhD candidates

All interviewed PhD candidates experience limited feedback on their artistic work in doctoral supervision. Six out of nine PhD candidates perceived the limited artistic feedback as problematic. According to them, artistic feedback is something they yearn for on a frequent basis but is not provided substantially. In formal doctoral supervision situations such as annual doctoral evaluation or PhD group seminars, feedback remains superficial and evolves around tangible, discursive material. PhD candidates experience this as missed opportunities for valuable exchange on the work itself.

In formal situations where the doctoral research project is submitted for feedback, the art work itself remains overlooked and/or under-discussed.

In contrast, three out of nine PhD candidates did not perceive the limited feedback as problematic. These PhD candidates stated that as 'mature', 'established' artists, the artistic work or process is not something that needs to be discussed or looked at by others, such as supervisors or peers. One of these PhD candidates felt that addressing artistic work directly throughout the PhD journey would mean 'overdoing it'. For this PhD candidate, artistic feedback would hinder the flow of making art and decrease the confidence of the artist in taking artistic decisions.

Discussing written outcomes: the easy route

A PhD candidate in visual arts (f, 30-34) states that during the annual evaluation with her doctoral committee, the discourse was focused on language and not on the artistic work: "as if the committee needed something to hold on to because they could not get a grip on my artistic practice". This trend continued until the end of her PhD journey. Exchange and critical dialogue on the work itself was something she would look for herself outside formal activities of the doctoral program.

In formal situations where general updates of the doctoral research project are presented, written components win the attention. A PhD candidate in music (m, 40-44) explains that in the dialogue with the supervisory team, the dialogue would evolve around general aspects of the doctoral project:

> *"The supervisory team got together. [...] They were all exposed to the artistic work and that probably played a role in the horizon but they talked more about the text than about the work which is a thing that is an ever-presenting evolving problem of what is more easily criticizable or workable because it's more tangible as an argument.", PhD candidate in music, (m, 40-44).*

Similar experiences during formal group-supervision or annual evaluation were shared by other PhD candidates in different artistic areas. These experiences generally are understood as followed: **What is written, is more tangible and therefore easier to hold on to.**

All PhD candidates stated that most non-artist supervisors find it challenging to understand the role and premises of the artistic work/practice within the scope of the doctoral dissertation. This results in a lack of exchange with the work itself. PhD candidates feel that the nature of the encounter with the work is poor and that it is therefore hard to have meaningful exchange on the work. For some PhD candidates this is not perceived as problematic, as they value other forms of expertise that the supervisor can bring to the table, such as the transfer of academic skills: writing, argumentation and use of theory.

What about artist supervisors? Four out of nine PhD candidates state that artist supervisors address mainly written outcomes rather than the artistic work. A supervisor in music (f, 45-49) brings forward that discussion on the work of students can be challenging, as different views on the work by other supervisors hinder a meeting point for discussion:

> "If there are some people involved in an artistic research project who have different views on the work and the quality, there is not really a meeting point for discussion so that is a challenge. Maybe that's something supervisors should discuss, how do we talk about this? Not only as a craft person. It's not that it's about who played faster than the other one, but it's like: is this a good artist? Is this artistically good? So maybe to have this discussion amongst the supervisors would be a good idea. In a department this kind of discussion between the supervisors must be there so that you don't take for granted what is good or bad. And also with the students of course you could discuss: what is artistically good?"

Other settings where artistic work can be overlooked or under-discussed are situations where PhD candidates come together with peers from the same doctoral program and/or PhD group. The settings we refer to in this section can be seen as formal PhD seminars[5]. In formal PhD group seminars, there is often the opportunity for students to present doctoral progress and receive feedback from peers and/or supervisors, doctoral staff or external guests. Five out of nine PhD candidates have reported missed opportunities for feedback in such PhD group seminars. Organizational characteristics such as mixed PhD group composition and a lack of sense of belonging in the research community seem to make it more challenging to address the work directly in these seminars.

Discussing the surface: the only route?

The group of peers that a student interacts with during the doctoral trajectory can take various forms. Some PhD groups consist of only PhD candidates from a certain supervisor or a supervisory team. Other PhD groups are institutionally embedded and, for example, composed of all first-year doctoral students of an artistic doctoral program. In other cases, PhD candidates have access to different PhD groups if doctoral programs are organized in multiple institutional contexts.

<div align="center">"The only thing you have in common is the artistic research"</div>

The following quote from a PhD candidate in visual arts illustrates that it is hard to discuss artistic work in a PhD group that is composed of students working in different artistic areas.

> "When you are in a group with people that are working with painting or performance, it is broad. The only thing you have in common is the artistic research so it ends up we talk a lot about artistic research, which is not that interesting because it's like you are talking about the method and not about the

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5 With formalized PhD seminars, we intend seminars or PhD group gatherings that are part of the doctoral curriculum. Opposed to the formal PhD seminars are informal PhD settings where peers self-organize activities.

content. Artistic research is very much often self-referential. You end up talking about artistic research in general instead of your work." PhD candidate in visual arts, (m, 25–29).

Referring to the material collected for this research, we observe similar issues when PhD groups are mixed. The difference in artistic background or expertise makes it harder to establish a common ground to reflect upon. Feedback tends to stay superficial and is referred to by PhD candidates as 'not interesting' and 'not very engaging'.

No sense of belonging in the research environment

Another area of concern is when PhD candidates have no sense of belonging within the research environment(s) in which they are ought to complete their dissertation.

<div align="center">"Just make a ghost seminar"</div>

A PhD candidate in music from Belgium expressed discontent with the way PhD seminars are organised. In her specific context the activities of the doctoral program and her particular work take place within an artistic research institute, but her doctoral degree is awarded at a university. In both contexts she has access to PhD groups, but the nature of the encounters with the groups differs greatly. In one group – related to the university – she describes as feeling an 'outsider' and a 'bureaucratic issue' within the system.

> *"We had two seminars per year and they are helpful, but if you only go every six months, it's not enough. I would appreciate to present more in the context of the university and get to know my peers. We get these unpersonal newsletters, but what do you do with it? You cannot invite yourself. We had one seminar where I was invited to present but it was really small. It was an audience that they choose and there was no feedback at all. I felt, okay I don't feel like coming here. Just make a ghost seminar.",* PhD candidate in music, (f, 25–29).

A recurring theme in the accounts given by PhD candidates was a lack of sense of belonging in the research environment. This is especially the case in contexts where doctoral programs depend on the recognition of universities and where students are obliged to complete courses irrelevant for artist researchers. For many PhD candidates there is a desire to be able to fully participate in peer activities and creating engaging exchange.

When PhD candidates can't find the support or guidance needed within the institutional framework, they will look for opportunities for meaningful exchange elsewhere. Several PhD candidates have reported self-organizing PhD or peer group gatherings where dialogue on artistic work and collaboration can take place.

Artistic feedback takes place on conditional terms

From the 12 supervisors we interviewed, six are non-artist supervisors and 6 are artist supervisors. In most cases all supervisors were familiar with the research areas and expertise of their PhD candidates. Eight from the 12 report that addressing artistic work directly can be challenging and –in some cases - therefore avoided. The setting in which artistic feedback is avoided is mainly in one-to-one supervision.

When asked why it is challenging to address artistic work more directly, the supervisors replied that there is a lack of clarity and criteria to do so. Looking more closely at what kind of clarity and criteria supervisors refer to, we can observe that most supervisors explained their avoidance of addressing the artistic work in conditional terms. In other words, in order to be able to address the artistic, one or more conditions must be met.

Some examples[6]:

'If I knew what the criteria can be to critique this practice, I could give more valuable feedback.'

'If I knew how to formulate what I think is 'off' about the work and how the PhD candidate can move forward with my comment, I would be able to talk about it.'

'If I were more familiar with this artistic area, I would be able to have a meaningful exchange about it."

'If I knew how to formulate my critique in a way that is not hurtful, I could be more straightforward with my PhD candidate.'

'If I knew when to speak from what role, I would be able to formulate better my input on the work.'

'If I knew better what the actual requirements are to complete a successful project, I could give better feedback on the work.'

Interviewed supervisors tend to refrain from giving artistic feedback when:

- they believe their input won't be of value,
- their input is not as informed as they would like
- their input might be taken personally.

Critique, exchange, dialogue, what's in a name? Role and meaning of artistic feedback in doctoral supervision

In this paper we use 'artistic feedback' as an umbrella term to describe the act or process of addressing artistic work in doctoral supervision. The understanding of artistic feedback is – or should be – specific to local needs. We haven't tried to formulate a definition of artistic feedback, nor do we have the ambition to formulate one. Instead, we intend to understand the meaning and role of artistic feedback for supervisors and PhD candidates in doctoral supervision.

How do supervisors and PhD candidates describe the role and meaning of artistic feedback?

In the interviews, feedback was framed in terms of the meaning and function it fulfills in artistic doctoral supervision. Some describe talking about the work as giving critique, others describe it as challenging an argument or evaluating artistic quality. We observed that some interviewees would use words as 'critique' in a context where the artistic work is challenged, but 'exchange' in situations where ongoing dialogue takes place. 'Feedback' was mainly used to describe group settings where a clear presentation or exhibition takes place prior to the 'feedback'. In other cases, for example, 'critique' and 'feedback' were mixed without a clear difference in connotation. It is important to keep in mind that most interviewees were not native English speakers. We therefore cannot assume that terminology is used in a correct or consistent semantic manner.

In what follows, we illustrate various understandings and interpretations of artistic feedback in doctoral supervision.

Critique to discover how the work can be operated, understood and perceived

"Critique to me is the natural part or problematicity of working with the material. Maybe that's one of the essential elements of why it makes sense to call it research. It's a matter that you bring, a material with a

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6 We have not used the verbatim quotes of the interviewees as these tend to be long and/or fragmented. Instead, we have distilled the conditions for the sake of clarity.

quite open and flexible and broad meaning becomes something that you cannot claim all knowledge about. You are trying to discover possibilities of how that can be operated but also how that can be understood, how that can be perceived, how that plays together with other things so I think that movement towards the criticism is trying to get at that. Trying to say: okay I'm working with this group of things that maybe we can call material, how to operate with sound in a certain way and then yes then the criticism comes from somebody observing that and claiming what is happening and what is not happening from their own perspective and their own history and their own context and then that's what becomes a research object. So ideally when this criticism becomes a dialogue where we once in a while disagree but it's also good to agree. The argumentation is something that goes intertwined. It's the dialogue. So if I manage to do and make it work in both areas, I'm happy." PhD candidate in music, (m, 40-44).

Feedback to evaluate each other's work

"Feedback could be integrated in peer seminars like critical review or critical friend to look at each other's work. It's always delicate because people are not really used to evaluating each other in this discipline, but maybe that's something that you could expect on this level. The asset of academia in general, traditional academia, is that you have a seminar and you discuss the text. You don't discuss the person. You can easily be harsh in your critique but it's not personal. Of course it can be, but the main idea is to discuss the topic and the product and I think that must be possible in artistic research." Supervisor in music, (f, 45-49).

Feedback as a translation of the physical experience into language

"To give feedback on artistic work in artistic research means to translate the physical experience into language. Looking at art is not the same as the act of looking instrumentally, as taught in school. Looking at art means undergoing the work; trusting it will tell something. Giving feedback then means translating what you see and expressing that into words." Supervisor in visual arts, (f, 60-64).

Discussion to treat artistic work as an academic argument

"Artistic feedback is a way to debate the work as a 'thought-thing', as an argument you put into discussion. It is not about the person or your liking of the work, but about what the work brings to the table and what it stands for." Supervisor in visual arts, (f, 60-64).

Asking questions to uncover knowledge

"The source of knowledge often lies in the expertise of an artistic practice. Asking questions without using jargon is seen as a way of engaging with the practice and uncovering hidden knowledge." Supervisor in visual arts, (f, 60-64).

Feedback is rooting for the PhD candidate

"*Feedback is given in the process. You're at that moment where you can sit next to the person and think on how to help to improve and what kind of outside benefit could they benefit from? It's more like a coach in sports. A coach wants to help you in every way: your eating habits, your mental state, your physical state. The coach is rooting for you, he's on your team.*" Feedback specialist, (m, 50-54).

These accounts illustrate different viewpoints and understandings of artistic feedback in doctoral supervision. Taking that diversity into account, it is important to look for helpful strategies for the integration of meaningful artistic feedback practices that are translatable to local contexts and needs. In the following section of this document we formulate such general recommendations.

Roadmap towards meaningful exchange on artistic work

There is obviously not a straightforward answer, nor should there be. In what follows we distill a series of broad indicators that seem to reflect a consensus view on useful components that can lead to constructive exchange, as well as strategies to actually address artistic work. Some of these pointers would apply in general; others work in interaction with the organisation of artistic research programs and communities.

Key areas of considerations and helpful practices divide the roadmap into four parts:

- Establishing constructive foundations
- Establishing open communication between supervisor(s) and PhD candidate
- Giving and receiving artistic feedback
- Building community: the doctoral research environment

All these areas are interconnected, but we look at them separately to highlight specific sensitivities and considerations. The roadmap can be used as a navigation tool for organizing meaningful exchange on artistic work in doctoral supervision. Considerations presented here can be used in a group context as an instrument for open discussion within your artistic research environment amongst PhD candidates, and/or supervisors, and/or administrators alike. They can also be used individually to reflect upon your own artistic feedback practices as a giver/receiver/facilitator.

Establishing constructive foundations

What are helpful practices for establishing constructive foundations?

Artistic doctoral projects operate within institutional context(s). In every context there are – or might be – different understandings of roles and required competencies of the actors involved. The local culture or research culture(s) as well as traditions or conventions inform the parameters on which the doctoral project will take shape. Clarity on the institutional understanding of the artistic doctorate is the foundation of establishing open communication between supervisor(s) and PhD candidate, as well as giving and receiving feedback and building community.

What is the institutional understanding of the artistic doctorate within your context?

- **Gaining clarity on the institutional understanding of the artistic doctorate within your context**

What is the institutional understanding of the artistic doctorate within your context? Much thought goes into the articulation of institutional regulations relating to artistic doctorates, but these are then often relegated to a background framework. A more dynamic connection between institutional understanding as expressed in various documents and the practice of giving and receiving supervision could maintain a closer connection and deeper consensus of the relationship between in-supervision discourse and academic context.

Gaining clarity on the institutional understanding helps to actively reflect upon the trajectory of PhD candidates from pre-admission to post-defense. It might also help reflect on how you relate to the formal and informal understandings of the artistic doctorate and how that influences your practice – as a supervisor, PhD candidate, administrator.

Aspects to be considered in this respect include: What are admission requirements for artistic research doctorates of your institute? What actors decide who can start a PhD? Is it the head supervisor of a PhD group? Is it a board of supervisors, administrators and/or head of programs? On what basis is the artistic

practice in the admission phase assessed? What are general assessment criteria? What are criteria for looking at art and discussing art in this phase?

What are supervision roles? What are the skills and competences required? What are the formal agreements on supervision? How are formal agreements related to informal practices?

Who decides what is offered in the doctoral curriculum of students? What practices are in place that communicate the needs and feedback of students regarding the curriculum?

> For a more elaborative in-group or individual reflection, we refer to the output developed by the Zurich University of the Arts within the framework of work-package 'Doctoral supervisors'[7].

- **Developing criteria**

What can be criteria to engage more directly with the artistic work in doctoral supervision? On the basis of what criteria is the artistic area generally discussed, in for example art education? Are those criteria for discussion and critique still relevant within the understanding of the artistic research doctorate? What are or could be new criteria?

What is conventionally understood as a good musical performance in the context of performing a classical composition in a traditional concert setting, can be understood differently in the context of an artistic research project. Engaging with art in an artistic research context might require developing new criteria for discussion and discourse.

- **Developing institutional practice**

The institutional understanding of the artistic research doctorate can change over time. It can be helpful to develop an institutional practice for the involvement of the researcher community (supervisors and supervisees) in the continuous evolution of the understanding of regulations and expectations concerning artistic doctorates.

Establishing open communication between supervisor(s) and PhD candidate

How to build rapport between supervisor(s) and PhD candidate?

- **The dynamics and discourse in supervision**

Factors such as culture, tradition, backgrounds and perspectives inform how we communicate with one another. The dynamics and discourse of supervision vary greatly within institutions and between institutions. Supervision is a two-way process. Being articulate about expectations, needs and parameters of the relationship can help establish open communication from day one.

What if there were an (in)formal contract between supervisor and supervisee, identifying the parameters of the relationship? What are the expectations? What are or will be the parameters for artistic feedback? What are the roles of the supervisor within the artistic doctoral project?

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7 'Doctoral supervisors' is the workpackage with lead partner Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). 'Doctoral supervisors' is located in the second project phase 'Distinguishing the actors' of the Erasmus+ strategic partnership project Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates.

> A particular useful resource for this matter is the mindmap developed by the Academy of Fine Arts Prague within the framework of work-package 'Mind Mapping Supervision'[8].

- **A foundation of trust**

How to offer constructive and simultaneously challenging feedback? For honest, constructive feedback to be well received needs a foundation of trust. Establishing a foundation of trust takes time.

- **A foundation of openness**

Early in the supervisory relationship a playful exercise that can help establish a foundation of openness might be experimentation with supervision scenarios on an informal level. While testing limits and efficacy of different kinds of language and modes of discourse, supervisor and supervisee gain understanding of what each other can bring to the table.

> 'Simulating supervision scenarios' led by Aarhus School of Architecture[9] developed a useful training tool that enacts supervision scenarios by starting from supervisors and PhD candidate archetypes.

Giving and receiving artistic feedback

How to give and receive artistic feedback in doctoral supervision?

The art of giving feedback

The function, role and meaning of artistic feedback depends on general views of the actors, as well as the situation. The PhD candidate might look for a critical eye or statement on the work at one point in time. Another point in time the same PhD candidate intends to broaden the field of knowledge by going into dialogue about the work. The supervisor might gain a better understanding of the work by asking questions about the work or practice at a certain moment. Whereas in a different setting he/she might want to challenge the work. Being aware on what ground the feedback is given will eliminate most unknown factors that might cause issues. To what extent are all parties informed about the premises of the feedback situation?

What if the work that is presented causes a reaction that is not explainable in jargon or clear argumentation? Often there is distrust of using emotional or physical experience in feedback, even though the effects of art can be mental, emotional and physical. There might be a perceived implicit hierarchy that appears to prioritize 'intellectual' exchange or exchange that is as 'objective' as possible; indeed, such a tendency might encourage supervisors to avoid the challenge of directly giving artistic feedback. This situation could exclude actors – supervisors and supervisees - that have no expertise in a particular area, such that they refrain from giving their feedback.

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8 'Mind Mapping Supervision' is the work-package with lead partner Academy of Fine Arts Prague. 'Mind Mapping Supervision' is located in the first project phase 'Setting the Framework' of the Erasmus+ strategic partnership project Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates.
9 'Simulating supervision scenarios' is the work-package with lead partner Aarhus School of Architecture. This work-package is situated in the second project phase 'Distinguishing the Actors' of the Erasmus+ strategic partnership project Advancing Supervision for Artistic Research Doctorates.

We lay out considerations for engaging, pertinent feedback on artistic work in doctoral supervision. These considerations are formulated on a general level, leaving space for specification within your context.

<p style="text-align:center">Trust - undergo – settle – translate – feedback – feed-forward</p>

Trust

Before looking at what is presented – an art work in progress, a performance, an installation – trust that the work will tell you something.

Undergo

Adopt an uninhibited attitude to undergo the work in an open and curious way. Try to temporarily leave your knowledge, expertise or expectations at home.

Settle

Take the time to settle in the experience before going straight into exchanging thoughts.

Translate

Try to articulate what you see, hear, experience. Borrow your glasses. Translating the experience into language can be challenging, as the physical experience is not chronological, while language is.

Feedback

Contextualize (subjectivity)

Where is the feedback coming from? What is the context? From what perspective? Explain where your arguments come from. Taste or opinion can attempt to creep in. Try to be as clear as possible as to its parameters and influence. By the same token, apparent agreement may conceal very different reasons for judgement. Stating that something is terrible can only be a valid form of critique when using a perspective from which this can validly be described as terrible.

Interactive

Be engaged and present. Ask questions.

Feed-forward

Reflect on the goal of the feedback session. What can be fed-forward? Feeding forward can be by challenging the work, by addressing a perceived problem or asking challenging questions you suspect the artist has not yet considered. Feeding forward could also mean intervening in the process of art making. Some supervisors can introduce a new way of doing, inviting the PhD candidate to take it into consideration and report its influence.

When addressing a problem, attempt to give something useful back in the form of constructive suggestions – if suggestions are welcomed. How can the work be challenged? Is there a form of critique necessary for the overall project or is it your own perspective of what is good or bad? If the bad intonation of the violin is irrelevant for the time being, don't address it - unless it's a recurrent problem and intonation is one of the assessment criteria in your context. Being aware of the general understanding of the doctoral project within the wider research environment helps clarify the kind of feedback that is relevant.

Receiving feedback, from yourself and others

Feedback from yourself

Adopting an outsider perspective as the maker yourself, can help de-personalize the work – which in its turn can contribute to better receiving feedback from others. Self-reflection practices can also help identify problems or identify embodied/intuitive patterns.

In 'Conscious action through conscious thinking' Benammar (2004) explores reflection tools to be used for experiential learning. Different exercises help the actor detach herself to reflect on previous action, and then find ways to go ahead. What is interesting about these exercises, is that they provoke creative thinking.

Feedback from others

Decide at what point in the process you allow feedback. Try to identify problems or questions related to your practice. The self-reflective practices can be a starting point.

Before presenting or showing work: come with a question to make the discussion afterwards concrete. Be aware of the situatedness in the critique that you receive. When feedback is harsh and very pointed, it can inhibit some of your ideas before they are put in practice because you believe your feedback givers.

Be ready to receive questions on your work. It's okay to ask for suggestions, but it's not okay to jump defensively to misinterpretation.

Building community: the doctoral research environment

The doctoral research environment looks different in every context. In some contexts, the PhD candidate is well integrated in the wider research community consisting of artist researchers or researchers in other fields. In other contexts, the PhD candidate is only integrated in the PhD group or peer groups. A sense of belonging and community is important for the PhD candidate, as the process can sometimes be described as lonely, long and challenging. Being able to have access to a space of inspiration, exchange and collaboration is valuable.

How to create a sense of community? How to create an open and safe environment for meaningful exchange to take place?

Also here, gaining clarity on the institutional understanding of the artistic doctorate is the first step. What do supervisor and supervisee expect from each other? What is expected from the institution? What can be facilitated and by whom? What kind of profiles are in the PhD groups? Is self-organization feasible or might supervisors, administrators or doctoral staff set things in motion and guard helpful practices to be sustainable?

Related to the topic of this document we lay out considerations for building community by implementing practices that create open and safe spaces for feedback amongst peers, supervisors and others.

Implementing a feedback culture?

Implementing a feedback culture into the doctoral research environment can be seen as an in-house sounding-board and collective learning experience. How that is organized depends on the needs of the research environment.

Some considerations are worthwhile exploring when implementing a feedback culture:

Formats

Depending on what you want to achieve, you should use a different format. Developing formats for feedback always have to fit to the goals. Starting from existing formats and refining them is a helpful practice

If the purpose of the gathering is to report progress, what can then be formats to request from the PhD candidates that will enable them to report in a way that sparks meaningful exchange?

Frequency

What is a feasible frequency to organize seminars with feedback?

Facilitation

What can be allowed within the current possibilities to facilitate engaging gatherings? Is it possible to facilitate collaborative practices between peers or supervisors? Can self-organisation be facilitated on a formal and informal level?

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