EDITORIAL

Mahkuzine's issue #2 is an outgrowth of the Dutch Artistic Research Event (DARE) symposium, organized by MaHKU together with Casco—Office for Art, Design, and Theory. The symposium concluded DARE events such as an exhibition of the final work of graduate students in five art spaces and institutions in Utrecht: Expodium, Academy Gallery, Casco, University Museum, and Central Museum. ›
In the context of exploring artistic research, the DARE symposium sought to profile complex and critical positions, while highlighting experimental and analytical modes of investigation in both visual art and design. Participating were Pauline Terreehorst, Martin Beck, Daniel van der Velden, Emily King, Stefan Dillemuth, Florian Pumhosl, Dave Hullfish Bailey, Wendelien van Oldenborgh and Emily Pethick. ›
Kilian Idsinga's graduation thesis Public Domain According to Corporate Colonialism and Heino Schmid's A Solipsistic Argument of Art Documentation were chosen as excellent examples of methodologies in artistic research essays. Mahkuzine will continue to publish alumni essays of outstanding quality. For Mahkuzine #3, essays by Anne Andriesen and Ellen Rubel have been selected. ›
In the concluding interview of this issue, physicist Robbert Dijkgraaf talks about creativity in both visual art and science. His views on the similarities and differences between scientific and artistic research offer novel insights into how research proceeds in those fields. ›
The Reports section is written by MaHKU's alumni. In a visual contribution, Joris Lindhout reviews Chronology, a recent publication by Daniel Birnbaum. Karien van Assendelft reports on Out of Focus—a symposium she organized as part of her graduate work exploring artistic and scientific concepts of disruptions in perception. ›

Partners in Science

pauline terreehorst

What is the task of art institutions like the Central Museum in Utrecht? The other day, I read an interview with Nicolaus Schaffhausen, the new director of Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam. In that interview, I came across some familiar criticism towards classical museums like ours. Schaffhausen feels we should be leaders of the pack, i.e., we should be ahead of all other institutions in the Netherlands. In addition, we should have an international perspective, be intellectually challenging, and stop concentrating on tourism. I truly wonder whether people criticizing us like this are aware of the many tasks we already have. Of course, the classical ones are collection, preservation, interpretation of work we possess, research, and presentation. Those tasks require an enormous amount of work. Besides, we also concentrate on the context of everything we are involved in. Indeed, we do attract tourists. But why is it such a problem that museums like ours attract many visitors? ›

In such criticism, I hear false contrasts and false oppositions as if the museum should be an organization fighting the artistic laboratories around it. In that view, the museums should concentrate on paintings and old masters, while the laboratories should focus on installations, participants, artists, and the audience. But I think the museums and other art institutions and organizations should all work together. Why? If museums and art organizations would go back in history and research their roots, they all would discover that these roots are, from the very start, connected to science. Therefore, all art institutions, laboratories and museums, should become partners again—partners in science—and stop competing with one another on the level of research. So we should look from the inside to the outside, concentrate on the world around us, and stop having silly debates. Let's face the challenge of contemplating the sublime; let's move forward from the moment to the process. Those are the things you as researchers will be confronted with whenever you work in the art world. ›

I have gathered some definitions about art. "Art is a reflection of human experience in a complexity." "Art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth." "Art is an instrument or revelation and conflict with the current society." But then, if we confront these statements with a definition about science, we suddenly discover novel notions. "Science: Intellectual research and logical planning in search of beauty and elegance." Beauty and elegance; those notions were missing in the prior definitions. But art institutions should be able to deal with questions like that. ›

At the same time, there are some problems with art definitions. To what extent can we claim to possess a unique sense of self if so many mental processes are innate? What is human nature in connection with DNA research? Who are we? How could art contribute to these kinds of questions without seeking a partner like science with whom art has so many issues in common? I mention a few: search for a universal structure, interpretation, quantum mechanics, looking for patterns, impressionism, looking for codes. And both art and science are confronted with similar ethical questions. Also, nowadays, both art and science are funded by commercial companies. The art world tends to suppress this fact. The art world does not want to talk about money, it only wants to use it. But science is optimistically glad to get money. Sometimes they have problems too, but not as much as the art world. ›

At present, the art world tends to walk the unpopular path. Because of that, from time to time, one feels as though waiting for Godot.

- The images accompanying this symposium review are part of the Dare #1 exhibitions.

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

So as an art world, we have to reflect on what we are doing, and I presume that today's invited speakers will address some of the issues I mentioned. After all, the rooms with a view should not have blurry windows. We need a view, a perspective on a splendid visual future. In conclusion, I would like to stress that, in the art world, we should look more to the outside world. We have to work more closely together in order to find a new role for art in the age of science. Could that beautify art again?

Pro-Activity in Design

daniel van der velden

My work consists of both a design practice—together with Maureen Mooren—and a design research studio called Meta Haven, where I work with three partners, Vinca Kruk, Adriaan Mellegers, and Tina Clausmeyer. Although I will speak today about design research, I became interested in doing research precisely because of my design practice, where we continuously experiment and also develop new strategies on both editorial and visual levels of design. I believe it is important to work in a discursive, pro-active and hypothetical manner with visual strategies that go beyond standard briefs. Examples of those strategies can be found in commissions such as ROOM, *Archis* magazine, and Holland Festival. ›

However, for me, there is an absolute difference between transgressive design and design research, although there may be visual overlaps. Meta Haven's design research has been more than anything else a learning process that started with a bold and ambitious statement in 2003: to engage graphic design in monumentality, fiction and myth. I have always felt somewhat uncomfortable with the limitations of information design as far as its disposability and lightness were concerned. The status of the information design object is, in a general economy of things, relatively low. It is obvious and entirely logical that most people look at information design for practical reasons. After they have consumed the information, they dispose of the carrier. In all the suggestions about the loss of physicality involved in the transition from printed matter to the World Wide Web, one often forgets that users cannot throw away a website as they would a printed gallery invitation. ›

I will never forget the presentation of my work to a Rotterdam-based potential client. I showed two self-written invitations for an art space called ROOM, which explored the role of fiction and its relation to information. I found out a little later that the two invitations were not only in my portfolio, but also in the client's trash can. He had just received them in the mail and tossed them out. It was not so much the disposability of our ideas that shocked me, but the disposability of the object transmitting them. ›

Thus, the temporal, ephemeral nature of information design is at the basis of the graphic design profession. Both the notion of usage and an aesthetics of trash have been important issues in much of the earlier work, such as the design of *Archis*, an architecture magazine that could be disassembled, commented upon, and reconfigured by the reader. The interactive dimension of the *Archis* design was a sort of negotiation space between the aesthetics of trash and a possible dialogue expressed by *Archis'* essence. ›

While working on an issue of Archis, I learned about the *Principality of Sealand*, a self-proclaimed monarchy, existing since 1967, located on a deserted World War II fortress in the North Sea. Its structure has become a data haven connected to the Internet and hosting all kinds of content out of reach of existing legislation. This bizarre island is fascinating because it expresses at a very primary level a desire for both power and anarchy. The notion of desire is the utopian element of Sealand, since substantial levels of power are obviously not achieved, but only wished for. In addition, the incredible ugliness of the platform is about primordial desire similar to the kind of desire found in some of the architectural proposals by Frederick Kiesler, Constant

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

Nieuwenhuys, and Hans Hollein. ›
From the outset, Sealand has issued its own unrecognized currency and stamps, designed in a highly traditional, and slightly amateurish manner, failing to address the unmistakable darkness and myth factor of this platform. After I mentioned the idea of designing a corporate identity for Sealand to the Jan van Eyck Academie, they asked me to turn that idea into a research proposal for their design department. This is how the Meta Haven Sealand Identity Project came into being. Since Sealand is, in theory, a nation state, its representation would, in theory, be quite a serious affair. At the same time, Sealand is not a nation state whose history and identity can be written and expressed in the same manner as those of actual nations. In Sealand, it is not even clear what real history is. ›

Search engine Google enjoys a recurring presence in the Sealand work, especially in the earlier pieces where a visual tactics of search has replaced any central concept or idea. The resulting visual methodology is one where a multiplicity of messages and implications in each image share the foreground with others emphasizing that each image is both beginning and end point of a series of links. On a tactical level, it means that the possible research trajectories, which for the primary phase of the Sealand project were mainly trajectories of confusion and association, could remain visible in the final image. That method established a direct relationship between research and the visual. ›
Any preconditions for the Sealand identity were unresolved—resulting in the potential to find a variety of expressions for it, including essays and interviews. And most importantly, it brought our attention to politics, which has determined to a large extent later research agendas for

following projects. Although the output of the Sealand Identity Project was regularly shown to those controlling the Sealand platform—and the more glittery the results were the more they approved of it—there was no client and no commission. Thus, Sealand was pro-actively represented. Such pro-active representation, indeed, is a form of visual activism different from the reactivism most usual for design. ›
It is unclear whether or not the design created for Sealand has ever existed. The design has not existed practically and in a functional sense, but it did and does exist as a series of public symbols and ideas. It is here that a distinctly different economy of things must be mentioned, since the design research object behaves very differently from the design object. Its distribution "hi-jacks", and in a certain sense subverts, the image of Sealand. In a way, the choice is not to represent a corporate interest or a single point of view, but to highlight a topic in all its complexity. ›
Pro-active representation is a method that defies the conventional logic of designers being invited into a context by commission. Conversely, it is about engagement with a self-chosen context. Furthermore, the relationship with the chosen topic or content need not always be an affirmative one. It is possible to formulate criticisms through pro-active representation. ›
Those designers who become their own commissioners or work on self-initiated projects, might not get in return a fair trade for their discarded status as designer, since they are in direct competition with literature, art, philosophy, theatre, poetry, and music. Their positions are loosely based on the given that smart designers of curiosity have always been deeply engaged in neighboring disciplines and, thus, design could acquire a kind of familiarity speaking their languages. That, though, is not the design research that I wish to address. Whether or not we create a University for Design, a Monument for Design, or even a General Mandate for Design to be Anything You Wish It To Be, graphic design will forever exist in some kind of representational relation to the world. Designers able to create performances, plays, and novels are not changing that basic situation. The most important factor distinguishing design research from design practice is the lack of obligation to create a useful design object—and by useful I imply especially its answer to a preset brief of expectations and limitations if only its position In an ecoomy of objects. Therefore, the design research object has a status different from the design object. The design research object can be non-physical or hypothetically oscillate between idea, image, and physical object. ›
For me, design research is about an embrace and continuation of two

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

moments, where a work of design is at its fullest potential: the moment of study and the moment of proposal. Graphic design has no sufficient history and understanding of studies and proposals, since its focus has exclusively been on reviewing and evaluating finished, published results. I think we should break with that tradition..

Connector Joints

martin beck

In his talk, Martin Beck departs from the view that the design field has often been considered a treasure trove "plundered" by a variety of visual artists such as Andrea Zittel, Jorge Pardo, Tobias Rehberger, Liam Gillick, Florian Pumhösl—and himself. A fascination for design is connected with the exhibition as both a display system and a medium of communication. "Experimentation with display strategies is one of the main features of early Modernist exhibition-making and its function within the utopian concept of modernity was being negotiated. One can trace these experiments within artistic movements such as Constructivism, the Bauhaus, or Surrealism as well as within individual artistic, architectural, and design practices such as those of Friedrich Kiesler, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Lily Reich, or Marcel Duchamp", Beck claims. ›

The concept of information brought the experimentation with display strategies into a commercial arena including trade fairs, commercial advertising, and corporate exhibits. Beck argues that "experimentation within the field of commercial exhibiting was driven by the idea of indexing and structuring information with a special emphasis on making the newly advanced communication medium both visible and portable." Therefore, novel forms of exhibition systems developed including connector joints which introduced the process of unskilled assembly. At the same time, such systems allowed for continuous expansion of display structures enabling an ongoing growth of "exhibiting structured information." ›

As one of the early exhibition systems, Beck mentions George Nelson's 1948 StrucTube, "a conceptual prototype for many of the 1950s and early 1960s exhibition systems. Nelson and his office pursued the project throughout the 1950s and developed it into a mobile furniture system as well as into their seminal `jungle-gym' product display at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959." ›

In Beck's view, Klaus Franck's *Exhibitions* (1961) portrays a "typology of exhibition-related tools" underscoring how the medium of exhibition functions as a form of communication whereas the concepts of "exhibition and communication are short-circuited, systematically analyzed, and categorized." But *Exhibitions's* graphical lay-out is a treasure trove as well. "The book's text is set in English and German, heavily illustrated, covering mostly exhibitions from the late 1950s on both sides of the Atlantic. The information is laid out in a three-column grid and typographically determined by all 9-point Univers Light and Bold for body text, captions, and headers. The book is a remarkable product of a period style and its belief in tightly organized information", Beck reports. ›

Beck considers *Exhibitions* a major work indicating how exhibition-making has been transformed. "Its rhetoric, its editorial cataloguing and systematizing, as well as its wealth of illustrations show a tendency within commercial exhibition-making toward display solutions independent of actual spaces. The displays that seem to be most prevalent in that period are modular and infinitely expandable. They can be assembled and disassembled, easily crated and shipped, and then reassembled by people unfamiliar with the systems in space uncharted by the original exhibit's designer. Most of these systems use orthogonal connections key in conjoining structure, content, and environmental needs. Often the connections are made up of joints fabricated in various materials and still shine as blueprints for efficiency." ›

Beck continues to underscore the importance of the connector joints, "Looking through Franck's *Exhibitions* and through the documentation of commercial exhibits of that period in general, one senses that experimentation in exhibition-making has been condensed into a single suite of objects: the connector joints. They represent condensed

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

spatial and practical knowledge, and are symbols of economic organization and dissemination. Moreover, connector joints are the icons of a tendency translating modern rationality into administrative effort. Organizing and disseminating information (and thus the modern concept of emancipation through the access to information) becomes an organizational endeavor demonstrating the administrative precision and hierarchical integration of a modern military apparatus, totalitarian state, or industrial corporations." ›

In short, "orthogonal exhibition systems and the connector joints they are based upon submit information and dissemination under a geometric matrix. At the moment the exhibition system seems to become a free-floating agent, it succumbs to the symbolic logic of control." ›

Could the connector joint create connections where lines of research point to the articulation of a visual practice and design? In Beck's view, various linkages of artistic exploration of design could go beyond a mere plundering of design archives. ›

Beck concludes his talk with Charles Eames' famous words: "The details are not the details. They make the product. The connections, the connections, the connections."

DISCUSSION

MODERATOR: EMILY KING

EMILY KING **Has the exhibition ceased to be an important means of communication? Has communication been co-opted by search engines such as Google and the Internet?**

MARTIN BECK **I could argue that the exhibition has ceased to be a means of communication. I could put forward that the exhibition has reached a certain peak as a communicative form in terms of what the exhibition was conceived of in the Modernist period. Yet that does not mean that the exhibition as a form should stop, although one always has to take into account the exhibition format's history when developing an exhibition. In other words, one cannot create an exhibition without embedding whatever the exhibition intends to say in a history of communication.**

EMILY KING **In terms of an official design history, how could one accommodate that? How could so-called official design history cope with niche-making and fiction?**

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN **It is interesting to see what happens if you do not create design objects. That is something Superstudio had in mind. You only create design questions, not the answers.**

MARTIN BECK **Collecting non-actual items has always been a practice of institutional collecting. Look at the field of architecture, where some of the most exciting projects are the unbuilt ones. That could be analogous to graphic design where projects are not realized for a client, but indeed do exist as concepts.**

EMILY KING **In architecture, unrealized projects and their presentation seem to have obtained a conventional form. Would designers be interested in presenting their work in such a way?**

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN **I have never considered that. In fact, I am not inclined to have work in exhibitions, but rather in books. Let design work exist as much as possible as ideas. But as soon as designers are obliged to make a display, it somehow never works out. At the same time, all designers wonder what the agenda is for design research. I was actually struck by an article Martin Beck wrote about the 1990s debate on postmodern typography. The American critic Steve Haller criticized such typography by saying that what is allowed in college would not necessarily be allowed in practice. Interestingly, that statement is about control and about what is appropriate or not. However, it is strange that, in design, we deal with primitive definitions of what is appropriate and what is not. For me, the proposal as pitch, where one tries to win an assignment, and the resulting unrealized project, have no place in writing design history.**

EMILY KING **In the Sealand project, it struck me that many of the symbols you use, such as the credit card, are connected with the economic realm. Why is that interesting in an anarchist state?**

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN **The loss of objects implied in both Sealand and the Internet is symbolically overcompensated in proposals for stamps, coins, and credit cards. Once I had the opportunity to make a real postage stamp for PTT, the Dutch postage company at the time. That is a different situation. Although we attempt to get rid of value objects, we are also deeply fascinated by the codes of power and resistance inscribed in those same value objects.**

AUDIENCE **You said that you no longer want to use the exhibition showcase, but rather focus on ideas and books. What is the difference between that and showing work in a museum?**

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN **So far, we have only participated in group shows, which almost look like shops. That is not a pleasant context. I referred to exhibitions, not so much to museums, which have another form of logic. However, it would a challenge to think about what one could exhibit physically other than print outs. When you publish a piece in a book or a magazine, there is a chance that the context will be a bit more discursive than just showing it as an object in an exhibition. I am more interested in showing a work in such discursive contexts. Also the Internet could have a discursive function for design work.**

EMILY KING **I continuously evaluate connections between design and art. Martin Beck talks very confidently about the art practice, but seems slight-**

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

ly hesitant to apply that realm to a design object—as if there is some sort of hierarchy. Daniel van der Velden considers himself a graphic designer, but said that history will decide in the end what his objects are. How do you see yourselves in relationship to those fields?

MARTIN BECK **I believe that there is a basic distinction between professions. From what Daniel has shown, one could see that he is a real design practitioner, but I consider myself an art practitioner. Some works negotiate the boundaries between those two fields, but there is also a certain rigor based on sticking to the most methodological questions that the practice requires. Even though I sometimes engage in design, I would find it presumptuous to call myself a designer. I do not have the knowledge to claim that position.**

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN **Artists can do a lot of different things under the aegis of art. When I look at the work of Jorge Pardo or Liam Gillick, I see a lot of design in their work, to a point where it is even difficult to see how it differs from design. But I do not know to what extent these artists are systematizing or elaborating on the relationship between design and visual art.**

MARTIN BECK **I am more interested in discourse than in actual objects or actual production. Even if there is something to be gained from that actuality sometimes. But the discursive negotiation between the different fields and how one can profit from the other: that is where I would locate the methodological perspective of what I am trying to do.**

Self-Organized Research

stefan dillemuth

In Germany, where I come from, it makes sense to introduce research—Forschung—as a discussion topic, because in our fine arts domain research ranks very low. In other countries, research seems to be common in academies—mostly used to acquire funding—and basically every activity, like reading a book, is called research. Of course, I could speak out against research myself, since I come from a fine art context, where research is not done, and is even considered the enemy attacking the field of visual art. However, students keep on telling me that everything in the art academy will start resembling the university—including research. I do not want to go immediately into the concept of conducting research. Rather, I would like to go first through my own history as an artist and see how that connects to issues that could be called research-based. ›

My own art academy student experience was that art school education

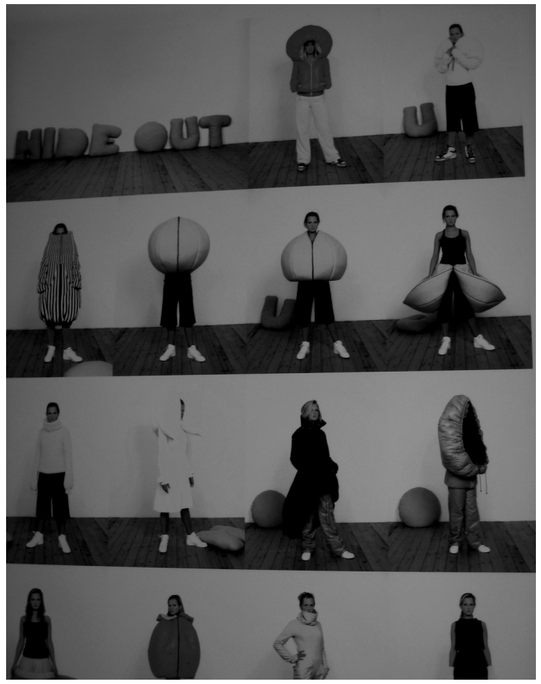
was similar to how parents tell you about the world. Everything is predefined, every image has been painted, and everything has been done. That is what teachers tell you; it evokes a sense of a closed world. How can you empower yourself to change that view and engage the world? One research motive could be to create a form of self-empowerment. Then the art academy could become a place where people from a situation of powerlessness are forced to find strategies and ways to gain power for themselves. ›

That takes me to the second research motive. Apparently, you learn most from talking to your fellow students and from sharing different forms of knowledge. Thus, communication plays a huge role in the process of self-empowerment and what I would like to call self-organization. As a student, you have to organize yourself, you have to create your own structure. From the notion of self-organization, I would like to move more specifically to the notion of research. ›

Most students who enter art school have some vague ideas about freedom. But since everything is already predefined, one hardly has a chance to discover what freedom is. That exact moment of powerlessness, that acknowledgement of futility, is the first step to self-empowerment. In my own artistic history, I entered art school in Düsseldorf in 1978. At that point, the Düsseldorf Academy and its glorious days with Beuys et al. teaching were over. In 1978, the academy was in the process of returning to a very conservative idea of art. Fortunately, outside the art academy something did happen. There were two bars in

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

Düsseldorf with the latest punk music and all kinds of imported ideas. The punk movement made clear what self-empowerment could be: you want to be a musician, but you can't play. You want to deal with culture, but you don't know how. You want to paint—the most conservative idea of making art and at that time totally outdated—and grasp the idea of novel painting in the easiest way. You just destroy painting after painting similarly to how punk music intended to destroy the idea of music. I would like to call such process research, albeit a pubescent version similar to Martin Kippenberger's famous titles *Through Puberty to Success* and later *Goodbye to Youthfulness*. So, research is also hammering at walls surrounding the predefined and investigating where the hollow parts are. That kind of research is absolutely right for people under thirty. ›



Back to my own artistic history. About ten years after Düsseldorf, I suddenly gave up the idea of becoming an artist. I was only a bit successful with my kind of do-it-yourself painting when, while moving to the city of Cologne and shopping around for a studio space, I found a storefront window space. That space could be used as a studio, but suddenly it seemed an absolutely boring idea to continue to produce art. Instead, I ended up in a four-year activity in the storefront space together with other people. We used it as an experimental site trying to avoid turning it into a gallery. The first half year we tested its possibilities. What could the space be used for? The first exhibition consisted of a car tire workshop—and no one knew whether it was a gallery or an auto parts store. Another show tested the simulation of a gallery by showing drawings from an unknown Fluxus artist. We just tore drawings from a catalogue, reframed them, and mounted them on the wall pretending to be a gallery. In the second year, I happened to have access to a 1970s newspaper and video archive. Because the archive was displayed as accessible information—back then at the start of the Internet one talked a lot about information—the place gained a social dimension. People would hang out there and the space turned into the 1990s hype of a so-called social, interactive space. At that time, basically every museum and every gallery realized that their spaces dominated by huge paintings in the 1980s had become empty spaces, since nobody cared anymore for those paintings. Thus, small spaces emerged where people could come and stay and interact by bringing in their own videos to watch. We also started researching historical exhibitions and art movements such as the Situationists, which could be considered our forerunners. We asked ourselves whether our kind of space with its self-determined, self-organized activities could become a model in itself. ›

Around that same time, I did some teaching in Düsseldorf, the place where I had studied fifteen years before, and I realized nothing had happened there. The professors were still there and the classes had still the same impact, whereas I came out of the madness of running that Cologne space for four years. Being involved in that kind of self-organized activity was actually more of an academy and more of an education than art school. ›

Since that moment, I have considered self-organized activities as self-organized art schools—at least that is one perspective. So, self-organized activities could be coined research or, better, bohemian research. Bohemian research implies research based on getting together with people, organizing yourself, building your own structure, and reflecting on those moments. There are also moments of bohemian research in history, for example in the Surrealist movement. How does bohemian research differ from non-bohemian research? That difference lies in the specific awareness of deliberately engaging in research as experimental activities with others, while reflecting on your own artis-

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

tic situation. The Surrealists always tried to analyze their effects. One could say that bohemian research is based in one's own artistic life and its possibilities. But I would like to emphasize again that I consider bohemian research part of art academies. ›

I published a book about those ideas and stressed that you have to create your own academy outside of the institutions. As a result, I was invited to become a professor at the Bergen art institute in Norway. There I became the preacher of the extra-institutional academy while I continuously questioned the need of academies where research and learning could be done outside of the institutions. Then the Bergen academy got a research grant from the government, which was the first time in Scandinavia that an art institution was treated like a university. So, the question arose as to what artistic research really is. In order to answer it, we got a research advisor, a person from a university context who said, "I do not know what artists research. You cannot define that. So, if you decide to paint a painting red and call that conducting research just go ahead." Still, what is visual art's field of research and what would be its topics? ›

Traditionally, research means you have to have a problem first. Then, secondly, you have to find out whether other people have a similar problem and whether they have worked that out. That is a necessary phase for research, but it is not research itself. It is called investigation, since you only find out what others have written. Then comes your research, i.e., you establish your own position. I could agree that we as artists work similarly. But what is our methodology? If scientists want to use a subjective point of view, they have the right to claim poetic license, but as an artist poetic license is basically a given. That license cannot be ignored since we always start from a subjective point of view. Still, we have to establish what kind of method we intend to use. That method is, of course, the method of your field of expertise. Artists have to employ their idiosyncratic qualifications for conducting research. Only from that point of view does interdisciplinarity make sense. Thus, artistic research is not necessarily similar to academic research. ›

Similar to the concept of research, the concept of interdisciplinarity went through an immense phase of overimportance. Everything that was interdisciplinary was cool, and everything that was not interdisciplinary should be forgotten. What is interdisciplinarity? I think that basically any expertise can be used in an interdisciplinary way in order to introduce skills and techniques into fields other than one's own. But how does that relate to research? Perhaps research is an experiment—not an illustration of what one has done before. An experiment puts

at risk what one has learned, since research tends towards innovation, although innovation cannot be promised. So the question is: How can one get to the nowhere land of innovation? As we know from the history of science, many things happen by coincidence and through mistakes. Although mistakes can help, one always has to keep in mind that conducting research is a process to be evaluated. Such evaluation is both for oneself and for the team one works with. That is what I would like to call a self-organized context. The outcome of the evaluation feeds back into the next experiment. The question still pending is: How will this structure of research be situated in the arts? ›

In my view, the field of visual art could be seen as a triangle existing among artists, institutions, and the public. That triangle is in constant flux through communication. Artists, institutions, and the public are shaping the idea of what art is at a certain time. So, what we have to research in art are the changes that happen in the field. But which of

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

the three factors will change the most? Currently the public and the idea of the public sphere are greatly transformed through the weakening of the nation state and the emergence of globalization. Through these developments the other two factors, artists and institutions, transform as well. How do these changes in the public sphere affect the image of artists and the institutions? ›

There are two models of thinking about the public sphere. In the first, Habermas explains that traditionally the public sphere and the relation to art and the sciences are defined by the nation state, a container defined by culture. In that culturally determined box, we negotiate all questions about art. In the second model, Alexander Kluge argues that the public sphere cannot be viewed as one entity, but a fragmented one, where a plurality of public spheres involves intersecting

and conflicting elements. Today, both models are under the rule of global economy where all public spheres are targeted as markets, or, if they are not markets yet, as is the case in certain subcultures, they are scanned in other to become markets. I would like to call that a corporate public. By means of sponsorship in the 1980s, branding in the late 1990s, and today's new strategy called corporate social responsibility, corporations are trying to infiltrate deeper and deeper into the different public spheres, i.e., into everyone's mind. Also the basic needs of society such as water and electricity end up more and more in the hands of corporations. Presently, corporations even seek to infiltrate educational systems. What is happening right now in Germany is a direct handover of a state-organized education system into the hands of a corporation. Universities and art academies can still be places for research, but corporate influence will increasingly force them to focus on certain kinds of research. Thus, in my view, self-organized practices will be the only place with a certain relevance for both artistic and critical research.

Contextualizing Abstract Language

florian pumhosl

Today, in the routine and speed of temporary exhibitions of all kinds, the exhibition as an experiential form is quite often considered an anachronism, something obsolete. However, in my view, there is no other way to articulate or narrate visual art. So, I would like to defend the cultural tourist perspective, i.e., a focus on the historical space created by things that are considered to represent cultural meaning. I like archeological museums, such as in Cairo or Pompeii, where one can experience that the museum does not convey anything about the culture, but only displays the idea of what has been identified as historical at a certain point in time. That is a preface to how my recent involvement with imagery started. ›

In the last ten years, many arguments in the debate on Modernism have been dominated by arguments of critique, critical distance, and critical discourse. That widely criticized debate has become a messy discourse. My work connects to the prevalent discourse about artistic research, as it involves research, but for me research is only a tool leading to experience. Experience might sound like a conservative term, but I lack a better one. To me experience implies a process of

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

reception and identification, of separating and displacing elements from genealogies. This year, my production has been dedicated to an attempt to make work as orthodox as possible. There are many reasons why my generation is fascinated with Modernism and modernization. The most serious one being that we might have lost an emancipatory agenda for the arts and this might be a way of rethinking and eventually recreating it. For the last ten years, I have thoroughly investigated the contexts of 20th century art history, which includes abstraction as its quintessential visual concept, in order to see whether there are at least some parts which I could integrate in my work or continue with. ›

What I like about exhibition spaces, museums, and art institutions is that under certain circumstances those spaces are able to create a sort of memory. Not only can one experience things physically in those spaces, but contribute to the production of that memory as well. For my 2005 exhibition in Gallery Daniel Bucholz, I wanted to relate to some moments of the origins of abstract language. One of the positions and receptions that inspired me was the work of the Belgium artist George Vantongerloo, where I found the motives of a bohemian researcher, a person who never conforms to what is expected. One of the glass paintings I showed was a tribute to an anecdote from the late 1940s, when Ellsworth Kelly was one of the many artists living in

Paris. When Kelly visited Vantongerloo's small studio he was quite disappointed because Vantongerloo was just repeating the old dogmatic phrases from the de Stijl movement and played his trumpet for hours on end. I really liked this moment of non-verbal communication between two different generations. One idea behind the images in the exhibition was to loosely connect to a music room or a salon. Also, since the salon had a fascination for scientific approaches and the display of macroscopic images, the exhibition contained a series evoking reminiscences of sound waves and the metronome. ›

My generation seems to have a very problematic relationship to history. What drives us to finally relate to history is not an unconscious exploitation of concepts or an imitation of curatorial strategies, but rather a connection with a sort of assimilation, where the tool of experiencing form is a very powerful one. It involves different discourses from different periods and attempts to make those evolve into contemporary works. For my abstract films, assemblages, and paintings I am intrigued by techniques that are hybrid or not yet canonized, but rather memorize something in themselves. While working with photograms, I introduced a similar, ambiguous form in painting, turning into a glass painting. ›

In another space of the same exhibition, I asked the question whether there are still ways of dealing with sources of Modernism. For example, Joseph and Annie Alberts' attitude towards Aztec production was very important for the discourse of their day. The Alberts accepted ancient Peruvian pottery and textiles and their patterns as a kind of abstract language in a non-hierarchical way. I showed assemblages in a museum display style. At the antique market, I found a chancay gauze textile made in one of Annie Alberts techniques and similar to fragments and samples in her collection. I substituted the image of the textile for the original, thus creating a framework where one could confuse photographic presentation with the original. In other words, I like to generate situations where different concepts of representation and usage of abstract images are able to interact.

Some Notes on Language in Research

dave hullfish bailey

An important operation in my work is the mapping of one place against other places. Some of these are "places" in the usual geograph-

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

ic sense and others are more along the lines of historical “nodes”, material “properties” or discursive “sites”, the trajectories of which intersect those of the geographical places. I allow these to overlap into multiply refracting networks, to form what one might call heuristic cartographies. ›

A recent example: A grain silo built by Hitler in Vienna linked, via scientific analysis of physical processes which cause grain dust to explode (a common industrial accident), to the discourse of the individual and the collective in modernity; this in turn linked, via Nietzsche’s use of the figures of Apollo and Dionysus to explore social cohesion and fragmentation, to the architectural symbolism of the exhibition site (Wiener Secession), a building requisitioned by the Third Reich to store grain in WWII and whose name is a kind of synonym for a central process involved in grain dust explosions—the splitting off of fragments from kernels of grain. ›

I say “allow to overlap” as it is quite clear that the terms which are linked in such a cartography, and the kind of analysis which perform such linkages, are rather flimsy from the methodological perspectives of those who generate and care for many of the facts and ideas upon which these mappings draw (trample?). Such judgment—whether by historians, scientists, art historians, engineers, etc.—points to an additional “place” or site: the site of the map itself, rather than that of the things mapped. It is through this additional location—where the language and images used to describe “places” are treated as having as much density as the things and ideas they signify—where much of the integument of the networks reside. This matter of language seems, if not to render oxymoronic, at least to destabilize any straightforward notion of “artistic research”. ›

To treat language as opaque material in the sense above creates the possibility that formal properties of a given descriptive term will direct research as much as the character or “nature” of the subject matter it sets out to describe. In other words, the “map”—rather than the “place”—may begin to determine the next area covered by the map. This is a familiar notion in art (the root of abstraction) and not unprecedented in science (it’s basically a linguistic version of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle), but I mention it as the term “research” seems to carry with it an opposite presumption—that language should be transparent, an unproblematic window into the truth (or at least the empirical description) of those “things” we research. We all know it isn’t so—that even photographs and cold statistics can be made to “distort”, even to “lie”—yet the qualifier “research-based” seems most quickly/frequently attached to practices that make some tacit truth claim. Put more precisely, the authority by which these practices—artistic and otherwise—are held to make such claims (political, social, historical, scientific, environmental, etc.), is correlated directly to that part of the practice which is “based in research”, and in proportion to the degree to which that part employs language in this unproblematic way. Or so it often seems. ›

I do not mean to imply that such a relationship to traditional research, nor the making of claims, nor even the “transparent” use of language should be excluded from the arena of viable artistic work and tactics. Rather, I simply want to point up a certain , perhaps hidden, epistemological normativism in the very term “research”, and ask some consequent questions: In what ways might “research” itself, as a methodology of knowing, be interrogated within those artistic practices which utilize it? Keeping the notional transparency of language intact, to what other ends than production of knowledge might research be put within artistic practice? Conversely, insisting upon the thickness of language, how might research itself proceed quite differently? Would this form of inquiry, despite the required shifts in methodology and teleology, still warrant the term “research”? And, finally, given that the ability to engender consensus has been a primary social function of traditional research (a function wholly dependent upon the co-implicating terms transparent language/ objective description), how might social space(s) be relocated and/or redefined when language is treated somewhat more opaquely?

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

Staging Real Situations

wendelien van oldenborgh

To present an insight into the method of working which has evolved within my practice, I would like to begin with introducing a 24 minute slide projection, called “The Basis For A Song”. This piece was produced in 2005 for the exhibition “Be what you want, but stay where you are”, the last part of “die Regierung”, curated by Ruth Noack and Roger Buergel for Witte de With, Rotterdam. ›

The question I wanted to address in this work was one around the notion of tolerance and the mechanisms of its manifestation. These mechanisms can be observed in the Dutch society, where conflict-ridden relationships tend to be avoided. Toleration and the rapid integration, which belongs to it, may drain the energy out of common forms of resistance or even civic responsibility. I took as a specific case a significant period in the recent history of Rotterdam: the late 1970s–early 1980s, when rebellious squatting and the punk movement developed a visible form of acting differently, which was tolerated and even immediately integrated into official policy. Since this development was partly led by musical movements, I was looking for a method to find a “song”, which would appear from the stories and which could link that period to the present day. ›

Throughout the 1970s a significant number of immigrants have arrived in Rotterdam and a “city renewal” project reshaped large parts of the inner city. Today the occupation of space is more economically driven and therefore much more hermetic. ›

In order to find the “song”, I have asked two members of the current music scene to try and tell the stories about the period I mentioned. They are too young to have witnessed the events of those days, whereas I am old enough to have experienced them personally. We took some time looking at the material together, and then spent one day in a sound studio. There they had conversations with squatters and members of other alternative groups from the 1970s, after which they created lyrics and song. I thought that perhaps, by shifting a few elements—like the performers being other members of the Rotterdam society than the squatters who managed to loose their outsider status so quickly—I could feed new components into the material and broach the issue in a surprising way. Both performers are of Surinamese descent and their own story would take its place quietly in between the outspoken issues. I could not control the process. ›

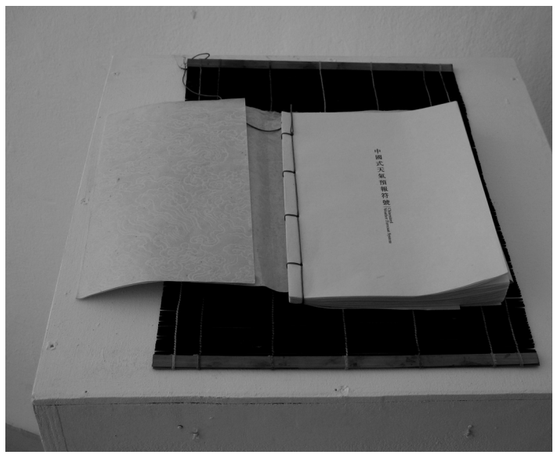
In the method, which was developing, first a set of parameters and conditions are created in which then a “real” situation is to take place. Everything that happened on that one day in the studio was recorded on video and the studio sound facilities. However, it did not become a film, but an installation with sound and projected images: stills of the video-recordings, transferred to slides and edited to form a flowing series. A screen was loosely leaning in the corner of the space and subtitles of all the lyrics and conversation projected separately on one of the walls. ›

Before I made this work I had started on another project called “A Certain Brazilianness”. In the attempt to find an alternative mode of production, A Certain Brazilianness became the title of a cross-disciplinary process, based on relations and resonances. Earlier works had been initiated by a purely observational viewpoint but it seemed necessary to integrate possibilities of production where my voice would be shared with other voices. At the same time, the production itself should be a form of “research”, meaning that discovering, uncovering, and instigating could be done through active production. ›

Concepts came from insights into the heterogeneous Brazilian culture, where a number of significant strategies, partly stemming from the

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

social sphere, have led to particular moments of cultural production. We can learn from those moments in today's Europe. As a working method, "A Certain Brazilianness" transfers these possibilities into the production of film, drawing on the basic language and roles in a film production to set up situations that lead to new relations. Two "stages" have taken place so far, which were public and productive. In these active encounters, the audience is part of the performance, and the performers are viewers and listeners as well as actors, creating the script and cinematic material during the event. ›



At this very moment, I am preparing the next stage, which will be produced next week in an open film shoot at the Mauritshuis in Den Haag. For this stage, titled "Maurits Script", in which I wanted to accentuate the element of "dialogue" in film, I also engaged in a more classic form of research. To create a script, I used words written during a specific period to spark new dialogue between people now. The script is a compilation of fragments of documents such as letters, reports, and minutes of the daily meetings of governing bodies and so on, from the colonization of northern Brazil by the Dutch West Indies Company between 1630 and 1654. Johan Maurits van Nassau, who built the Mauritshuis as his residence, was employed by the Company as the governor of this colony for seven years. ›
The script, coming quite directly from voices of the past, will be read by people who all have some relation to the Dutch colonial past or to the questions the script raises. This will be filmed in the Golden Room at the Mauritshuis, which is now a well-known museum with a beautiful collection of paintings, mainly pre-18th century. The audience is invited to join the film shoot. It will be a performance with two parts taking place simultaneously: one is the reading of the script, done as a proper film shoot. The other part is the discussion, which will develop between the waiting "actors". This part will be filmed as well with a second camera team. Each real historical character will be performed, i.e. read, by two different members of the group. This will produce more chances to see and hear the voices in shifted ways, creating friction with the words themselves. Almost immediately after the initial production, a first edit will be shown as an installation in Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht. During the exhibition the final edit will be developed in an ongoing dialogue with the participants who will remain involved.

DISCUSSION
MODERATOR: EMILY PETHICK

EMILY PETHICK **What struck me in all of your talks and in the works I have seen is the connectivity between different forms of information and the reflection on history. So, how do you relate the process of research to that approach to information and historical reflection?**

STEFAN DILLEMUTH **After posing the topical question of how does research relate to the idea of a corporate and fragmented public, I started to look back in time. Has the fragmented public perhaps not always been the case? I found out that reform movements, at least in Germany around 1900, already presented some kind of fragmented public. It may be that was the start of an "alternative culture" where people tried to break out of a hierarchical power pyramid in movements such as nudism, vegetarianism, and all kinds of reform movements. That then became my research material which I also used for teaching in a research group at the academy in Hamburg. Out of that, a theater piece evolved and later a movie. Currently, I continue that line by researching the concept of bohemian in today's Munich in the Bohemian Research Lab. The problematic in Munich is quite interesting since the city had a very poignant fin de siecle; in 1918 there was a Soviet Republic for a couple of months generated by artists. So, there is a lot of material that can be used as a metaphorical, parallel world to what one sees happening right now.**

EMILY PETHICK **All of you made clear that history is not a clear-set viewpoint. Things have been overlooked within history which could be reconnected to other areas in an unorthodox way.**

DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY **In that sense, I look to language as a sort of social architecture. I intend to propose subtle ways of connectivity without reduction to pure subjectivity. In order to avoid that, I really want to stay within**

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

language and treat it as thick, opaque material.

WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH **In the Brazil situation, there is always productivity in difference and conflict to be noticed. I want to use information and history traces in my works as ideas for productive situations where even conflicting parties could produce things like soundtracks.**

FLORIAN PUMHOSL **I spent much time identifying things and finding a way to bring them back to life in another period, to give them a different context. So, if I would make a list today of the most important abstract images over the years, there would be at least five works of graphic design among them. That is where I experience abstraction. The functionality of graphic design is just one layer but underneath there is a radical and abstract language. That could become something very vibrant in a different context.**

EMILY PETHICK **To bring the discussion back to the concept of research. Is it possible for art to enter into a more formal approach toward research?**

STEFAN DILLEMUTH **In that context, I still do not understand the frequently uttered criticism of the art field. Why shouldn't we call certain practices research? Look at fields such as cybernetics, or the science theory of Bruno Latour. They all come to a point where what they call research is no longer about truth or a monolithic end result. In the sciences, everybody knows by now that those notions are constructions. So, it seems to me that the sciences and their idea of research get closer to the arts than the other way around.**

INTERVIEW

Robbert Dijkgraaf

annette w. balkema and henk slager

QUESTION From your background in science and visual art, would you agree with the statement that both scientific and artistic researchers engage in forms of decision-making, implying the stating of problems and resolving them?

ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF My general philosophy is that those two fields are much more parallel than is generally acknowledged. Scientific research is often misrepresented, because its history is usually written in reverse as a logical series of steps. It looks as if the famous physicists throughout history have only made the right decisions while following a linear route. That, of course, is not true. Also, when you have to write a research proposal in my field, you have to fill in a sequence of subprojects you are involved in. All of that creates the illusion of a linear trajectory. ›

From a practical and personal perspective, I would say that scientific research is about doing unpredictable things, implying intuition and some measure of randomness. In a decision-making process, you indeed follow a certain path where many points indicate in what direction you are going, but you are not in a position to make any firm decisions. Sometimes you just follow hints. Thus, I believe that the notion of decision sounds too controlled and that does not do justice to the kind of uncertainties that both I and my colleagues experience in our scientific research. Thus, our research is more like an exploration than following a firm path. Both in scientific research and artistic research, you are by definition exploring some unknown piece. As an explorer, you are very lucky to enter an area nobody has been before where you have to invent your own rules. So, decision-making is more like an exploratory process.

Q Decision-making also sounds like a strong term for artists. At the same time, artists talk in terms of solving problems and making decisions.

RD But the question is, how much are you in control of your decisions? Remarkably, for artists the process of exploration is often quite

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

valued. People might consider the outcome bad art, but accept it because the artist is in the process of exploring and mapping possibilities. In scientific research, we also explore directions 99% of the time but we tend to emphasize the one successful route. That affects my students. The moment they start researching, I notice that they are somehow paralyzed, because they think they have to do the "right" thing. So, I have to tell them to just start exploring all kinds of things. "But how do I know that I will be successful?" they then ask. Of course, they won't. At the moment they have failed, I can only say, "Good, now we know that this path is not a path to the solution. So, we are going to try another path." While the path leading to a certain artistic product is often considered interesting, in scientific research we have to get used to that.

Q So is there a process of association involved in both scientific and artistic research?

RD During the intermezzo I had with visual art — for a short time I attended the Rietveld Academy of Visual Art and did painting — I learned to be open to experiments, to explore possible paths, and to check what does and does not work. In scientific research, we are not trained that way.

Q What then are the differences and similarities between artistic and scientific forms of decision-making and stating problems?

RD One major difference is that art is personal in many ways whereas science is not. If a scientist discovers a new particle, the particle was already there. It might be an individual achievement to make the discovery, but the moment the discovery is made, the moment the scientific result is produced, it is no longer the property of the scientist. Obviously, the artwork and its novel discoveries remain the property of the artist. ›
Yet, scientific discoveries have enormous advantages. For instance, there is often instantaneous recognition. Good scientific results get response within one day and the next week someone might organize a seminar about it. So, scientific work is absorbed very fast, which also illuminates a different dynamic in the scientific research process. You just hit the beginning of something valuable and immediately other people will move in and help excavate what you discovered. That sense of discovery — not of invention — of what is waiting out there, is a great feeling. In mathematics, everybody knows a mathematical

structure has been there for hundreds of years even though nobody wrote it down. In visual art, you indeed could discover a certain niche, but even then it is the quality of the individual artist that stands out. ›
Consequently, artists are less pleasant to each other than scientists. If a fellow artist creates a wonderful work, you will not necessarily benefit from that. In fact, your colleague could have an important exhibition, and you won't. But if my colleague discovers something, I know immediately what to do and how to operate. So in physics, there is much more mutual benefaction which, again, makes the process different. Typically, people tend to concentrate on a certain fruitful area of research, which at some point will become less productive, whereupon we all will move in another direction. So, there is a continuous movement into different arenas.

Q How does creativity play a role in those activities? Richard Feynman is known for visualization and imagination as a method in physics. Is he an example of a "visual scientist"?

RD Scientists did experiments and found that roughly half of people are helped by pictures, while the other half found pictures only made things more complicated. In physics and the exact sciences, people are definitely visually oriented. Obviously pictures are connected with geometry, while language has more to do with algorithms and a step-by-step logic. For visual objects, and particularly a three-dimensional object, there is no one way in which you can read it. There are many sides and you can rotate it. That is a good metaphor for how physics works. ›
In physics, our problem is that we work with very small, very large, very abstract, and very complex things which are by definition invisible. Since they cannot immediately be visualized, we need metaphors to describe them. Even our equations become, in some sense, metaphors because we do not speak in equations. So, we use metaphors and think of them as quantum processes, or space-time, or black holes. They are all metaphors to some extent and stand for very precise formulas and results. The great thing about physics is that many concepts can be summarized in one manageable metaphor or even picture. The process of discovery often proceeds in the form of informal discussions, where a diagram or an image can be extremely helpful. That is why we always have blackboards and chalk at the ready. Interestingly, these pictures are never very precise. We do not need a technical drawing, because the picture has to suggest many things. So, we use pictures in a loose, but powerful way. I have noticed myself that I

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

often have very concrete images in my head when I talk about abstract things. These things even have colors, forms, and shapes. When I try to solve a technical problem in my head, it is like having a jigsaw puzzle and literally trying to fit the pieces together. I really manipulate the shapes. ›

That form of manipulation involves the right side of the brain. People often think that people who are very precise use their left hemisphere, where logic and language reside. But visuality, particularly stereovision and geometric insights, are all on the right side, which is also the seat of creativity. In my branch of science, people are very visual and skilled at visual manipulations — even in higher dimensional spaces — even with things that cannot be visualized. ›

Feynman is an extremely good example of a physicist who actually was quite outspoken in his ideas about creativity. He stood in contrast to the prevailing image in his day of the logical, precise, methodical scientist. Of course, Feynman is known for the Feynman diagrams. In his era, enormously complicated computations typically took months and months. Feynman had developed funny diagrams for his own use. By manipulating the diagrams, he could arrive at the same result much quicker. Nobody took him seriously, until he went to a meeting and demonstrated that he could arrive at the same result in minutes which took one of his competitors half a year. Feynman commented how pleasant it would be if all physics magazines contained pictures in the future. And now magazines indeed are filled with them. ›

We often claim that formulas encompass much more than their original content. In a sense, the formula itself knows what to do. In art, you have something similar. In the decision-making process we spoke of earlier, you take a few steps, and then suddenly the artistic project seems to know itself what to do and proceeds naturally. At those moments, it is almost as if the project has come to life: it suggests many forms of exploration and is its own springboard.

Q Philosopher of science James McAllister once said that physicists consider aesthetic pleasure to reside in the concept of symmetry. Superstring theory produces specific forms of symmetry. How would you evaluate the concepts of symmetry and aesthetic pleasure in both science and visual art?

RD Symmetry is a very old concept tracing back to the Greeks and the Platonic forms, and also to the beauty of geometry. In art, symmetry has long been important. The remarkable thing in physics is that not until the 20th century did people come to realize that the organizing principle underlying all physical laws is symmetry. Interestingly, there is not much naturally occurring symmetry. We need artists to create symmetric objects. A wonderful insight in physics is that symmetry can be present in the underlying layers — thus, in the fundamental laws — but not be manifest. Symmetry is there, but only in the rules. Today, physicists are not looking at nature and its manifestations, but much more at the rules that make these manifestations possible. ›

To clarify, let us look at a chess game: it is played according to certain rules, but the rules are not the game. The same goes for physics. The rules of physics are extremely symmetrical and, therefore, physicists think of them as beautiful. That form of beauty is directly — not metaphorically — the same kind of beauty a geometrical figure represents. Symmetry is also interesting. Take a perfect round sphere, rotate it, and nothing will happen. By definition, symmetric objects are simple objects. Symmetry has to do with invariance, with little information. The lesson learned from physics is that the underlying rules are symmetrical, elegant, and above all simple. That simplicity encourages aesthetic pleasure. In fact, a physicist's aesthetic feeling is linked to how a simple and elegant equation explains a chaotic and complicated situation. ›

What has happened in physics the last hundred years is that the concept of symmetry has moved from an interesting side effect to the core of what physics is. Superstring theory employs that idea. In superstring theory, we explore whether symmetry is really the ultimate way to understand nature. But it could also be true that some bizarre accident will illuminate the need to replace the guiding principle of symmetry with something else. Symmetry is also related to the extreme mathematization of physics, turning it into precise mathematics. Again, mathematical equations are governed by symmetry and their beauty is much determined by the idea of having great symmetry and great invariance. ›

Physics is not about nature, but about how the human mind reconstructs nature. I am not even sure whether symmetry is that important for nature as such. But for humans it is, since symmetry penetrates nature and comments upon it. At the same time, we are extremely constrained in saying anything at all about nature, because our brain's architecture is constructed for analyzing visual data. That is why physicists visualize and why we recognize certain aspects of nature as being visual — symmetry is a good example of that. And that is also why visual art has such an enormous, direct impact on people. ›

Another relevant aspect for visual art is linked to how information is encoded. In visual art, you instantaneously see everything — both in

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

video and in a single image. Yet the relations between certain elements in images are not linear but connected in various ways so that our eyes wander around. That actually is a reflection of how nature is nonlinear — although probably in a much higher dimensional fashion — and linked to how our brain analyzes visual data. Such analysis is both closely related to our perception of visual art and to scientific subjects and forms of multidimensionality.

Q What could Feynman's principle of sum-over histories mean in the perspective of crossovers?

RD That principle is one of the most remarkable properties of nature, arising during the quantum revolution. We used to think that nature proceeded in a certain sequence creating the path of history. One way to interpret quantum mechanics produces the principle of sum-over histories, stating that a particle does not travel from a to b. The particle can basically follow any possible path, i.e., all histories are possible, although some are more likely than others. However, it is not so that somebody rolls the dice and one path is taken. Intuitively, one could say that all possible paths are taken at the same time without a clear-cut route. ›
There is a famous experiment with two open doors, where you can see that one particle is partly going through the left and partly through the right door. The final result is the grand total of all these paths. The world does not appear like this to humans, because this process is invisible to our way of perceiving nature. What we see is randomness. Ultimately, nature has a built-in randomness. ›
At its deepest level, nature itself uses the mechanism of creativity. The sum-over path is the exploration of various options. It seems to be somehow the essential ingredient of how nature works, since even the fundamental laws of nature are using the principle of various options. In this respect, I see great opportunities for visual systems. To a large extent, the visual arts are about organizing information, something for which science has a great demand. It is very difficult for physicists to get their hands on this information and to be able to manipulate it. So, I feel that the visual arts could be a great stimulus in developing ways to visualize things, thereby aiding the research process.

Q The philosopher Gilles Deleuze argues that philosophy as a field moves along by fabricating and inventing novel concepts. In order to create these, Deleuze utilizes various fields in a crossover style including biology, literature, mathematics, science, and music, to mention a few. What would you think of philosophical texts and/ or attempts to apply superstring notions, analogous to how Deleuze develops notions connected to movement in quantum mechanics and its principles?

RD I would be very cautious, although I would not necessarily object, because there should be no thought police. But it is very important to distinguish between quantum mechanics, laboratory research, and philosophy. For example, space and time for physicists are not philosophical concepts. For physicists, space-time is more like a material. In some sense, physicists think of and respect space and time and particles in the same way as sculptors think about marble, i.e. as the material. A lesson of art is that the material itself communicates — first of all to artists. Similarly, I feel that physical concepts belong to physics. ›
Metaphorically, philosophers could use these concepts. Philosophy should embrace all possible modes of thinking. I myself use ideas from quantum mechanics in pure mathematics. I always have to keep in mind that it is not about nature, but about mathematics. You can import concepts, but you should not confuse the fields. So, if philosophers would like to speak of particles and emission, I would use quotation marks, since they are not the same particles one sees in the lab. To be inspired by physics is fine, as long as you indicate what you are borrowing, and what you are not. Clearly, you never borrow the entire concept but only selected items. Ultimately, a philosophical work should be judged on its philosophical merit. ›
To come back to science and visual art, I have noticed in practice that it is difficult to collaborate or to be inspired immediately. That also holds true for the collaboration of scientists in different fields. But I do think that all of us — including philosophers — could be stimulated at a higher metaphorical level.

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

A Solipsistic Argument for Art Documentation

heino schmid

I REASONING

Recent developments in my own approach to art, artistic research and artistic practice have reaffirmed my interest in contemporary art production as expansive and non-static. I am interested in the way new media and technological advances have altered the possibilities of art production; specifically as it pertains to patterns and methods attributed to the personal or subjective in art that is more documentary or project-driven. It is a common assertion in art discussions that there has been a significant shift from art as object to art as project. ›

This is of course due to the continued redefinition of an artist from the tortured, independent genius working on the periphery of society, to artists as social beings communicating in direct response (not necessarily in opposition) to the social and political structures where those same artists find themselves, while working through a myriad of interdisciplinary media and contexts. It is therefore not a stretch to conclude that this redefinition of artists in the contemporary context is as middleman or medium to these "projects." ›

This terminology is encouraged (and rightly so) in the recent discussions and questioning of "artistic research" as it pertains to an artists' body of work, and how it feeds into a socio-political environment. Artistic research can be broadly defined as a methodical investigation of an artistic practice as it pertains to its social implications through personal or collaborative development, or a practice-based and practice-driven research within the large entity called "contemporary culture." Its attitude is to open and to include, not to exclude, not to build barriers between modes of expression and methods of knowledge production.'* Under this definition of artistic research one can suppose the inclusion of the project as a suitable format for this research. Although a project can take a variety of forms or systems relative to both content and artist, it implies a time-based thematic exploration. Art projects and the research they imply also provide a necessary measuring stick for critical analysis. This measuring, as I see it, is directly due

* *Artistic Research—Theories, Methods and Practices*; Mike Hannula, Juha Suorantn, Tere Vaden, 2004.

to the loss of autonomy, not of art, but of artist as a singular creative entity. ›

Here I wish to segue into my topic of discussion. This loss of an artist's autonomy, in my opinion, relates directly to notions of art as documentation as proposed by Boris Groys in his essay *Art in the Age of Biopolitcs: From Artwork to Art Documentation*. He states, "Art documentation is neither the making present of a past art event nor the promise of a coming artwork but the only possible form of reference to an artistic activity that cannot be represented in another way."* ›

The rationalization of Groys for this definition of "art documentation" is in the context of "biopolitics", which is a term he appropriates from Giorgio Agamben (among others). In his text "Movement", Agamben defines the biopolitical in relation to "the multitude" as "a demographical biological entity."** Groys, however, redefines biopolitics as the technological "reshaping of life" to "a pure activity that occurs in time."*** Groys continues and uses this term in the context of art to argue his case for art as documentation. "The art that is made under these new conditions of biopolitics — under the conditions of an artificially fashioned lifespan — cannot help but take this artificiality as its explicit theme."**** If one accepts Groys' supposition of "artificiality as [an] explicit theme" in contemporary art, then one can make a direct correlation and inevitably contextualize the rise of the art project as a dominant mode of art production. Since the biology of life is politicized through technological advancements, where life is understood to be a continuous "pure" action, the art object loses much of its sway and gives way instead to the less static art project, which reflects more directly the (biopolitical) conditions under which it was made; ultimately taking the form of art documentation. ›

A simplistic inference of this assertion by Groys would then be that: LIFE, which is intrinsically politicized (politicized is used here strictly in the context of Groys' appropriation of the word as it pertains to his definition of the biopolitical) is conditioned by the ARTIST, who by virtue of being alive becomes politicized; to create ART; which, through an artist's subjectivity, automatically becomes politicized, and re-enters LIFE as such; which absorbs art and reveals its intrinsic politicization, because LIFE (as already stated) is intrinsically politicized. Or even simpler put:LIFE " ARTIST " ART "LIFE and so on. ›

Arguably this is an extreme dumbing-down of Groys' text and could fit all art movements of the last hundred years (if not more) under its umbrella. However, if life has become "pure activity" and art has evolved to reflect this activity through documentation as the dominant medium, then a cycle is suggested; and this is the cycle I propose.

* *Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Art to Art Documentation*; Boris Groys (translation: Steven Lindberg); catalogue of Documenta 11, 2002.

** *Movement*; Giorgio Agamben; Internet source.

*** *Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Art to Art Documentation*; Boris Groys (translation: Steven Lindberg); catalogue of Documenta 11, 2002.

**** Ibid.

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

The obvious distinction here lies in this introduction of the biopolitical in art that eases the transitions between elements of this cycle. ›
Here however is where I interject. Groys goes on in his text to provide the ideal framework for art as documentation as the installation. "Art documentation, which by definition consists of images and texts that are reproducible, acquires through the installation an aura of the original, the living, the historical. In the installation the documentation gains a site — the here and now of a historical siting."* Although he defines installation in this context as possibly including any medium such as photography, painting, video etc., the context of installation still seems somewhat problematic. Problematic only in the sense of the "historical siting" of the installation, though reproducible as non-static, non-medium specific documentation, an installation still implies a fixed physicality that is only referential. It does not speak about art production and the inevitable subjective (even if it is biopoliticized) view, or intentions of the artist behind the installation. ›
This subjectivity may at first contradict my earlier assertion of the loss of autonomy not of art but of artist; however, I would argue to the contrary. As Petran Kockelkoren put forth in his introduction to Mediated Vision, technology mediates how our senses perceive the world.**
One can argue that this technological mediation is a global phenomenon where theoretically everyone has access to the same information at the same time (via the Internet for example) and is also subject to the same biopolitical conditions asserted by Groys. The question then is how do we (as artists) mediate the biopolitical, the artificial lifespan we all share? The answer is not through an autonomous "well of genius" we access when we want to create art, but through the subjective application and questioning of how we move in the world, which shares the similar undercurrent of the biopolitical. Through this viewpoint of mediation, we can see a clear break in the definitive similarities of autonomy and subjectivity. ›
The technological "mediation" that Kockelkoren proposes still holds an element of subjectivity or free will. Just because our outlook on the world is mediated through our movement in the world, how that mediation is perceived or applied in art is completely subjective. A photographic analogy would be that if you give a hundred different people a camera and ask them to photograph the same thing you will still receive a hundred different photographs (this is true even if Rosalind Krauss may argue to the contrary**). The camera as a medium, and the subsequent mediation of that camera as an extension of the eye, still is prone to the subjectivity behind the camera; hence no two photographs will be exactly alike. If you extend this analogy and substitute

* *Mediated Vision*; Petran Kockelkoren; Internet source.

** "A Note on Photography and The Simulacra"; Rosalind Krauss, in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*; edited by Carol Squiers. Bay Press, 1990.

the "artificial lifespan" as the common object, art as the mediated extension of the eye (i.e. the camera), we still arrive at the same conclusion; complete variations of the object or life in this context. No two artworks are the same. This is due entirely to the subjective mediation of how we move in the world, even if we move in similar ways. ›
How then do we understand the gap between the common artificial lifespan and the variety this lifespan produces in art? One can argue that contemporary art is perhaps more diverse and varied now than in the entire history of art, cross-disciplinary thinking and production abound and the accompanying critical discourse is equally variable. Rules no longer apply. The answer is of course experience. Groys' argument for the "biopolitical" life, or the "mediated" life that Kockelkoren proposes, is a satellite view of life. We are still subjected to our own experiences and whimsical tastes no matter how collectively mediated. ›
An interesting conclusion, though under a different context, was put forth by the art critic Johanna Burton in her text *From Rationalists to Mystics"**, where she supposes the acceptance of "solipsism" in contemporary art in critique of a "system" through the adoption of that "system." System, in this context, is defined as the specific social and political conditions under which art is produced; namely, in the traditional context of the avant-garde, as seen in the term "against the system." System, however, is still vague so I will attempt to put it into some context here with the inclusion of the "biopolitical" lifespan as the system to be discussed. Burton's supposition is that the successful solipsist in art does not go "against" any system but appropriates it and through individual bias, defines the parameters of that system with a strict personal subjectivity. Burton appropriates this term of solipsism from an earlier text by artist and critic Mel Bochner, in his 1967 essay *Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism***, which discusses solipsism in the context of serial art. Solipsism in its traditional context is a philosophical term that argues against an individual's objectivity, stating instead that a person is only able to perceive him/ herself absolutely; and that any attempt to fully understand aspects in their environment is subjective, and becomes ultimately futile. Usually held in the negative, solipsism is appropriated by Bochner and Burton in the positive. Burton's appropriation of the term is in defense of conceptual art of the late 1960s, traditionally contextualized as being a mathematical, data- based process that gave precedent of an idea or information over personal aesthetic decisions. Burton, however, argues to the contrary that artists such as Sol Le Witt, Adrian Piper and others have used Conceptualism and other Post-Minimalist thinking to create a personal, subjective and "solipsistic" dialogue with the socio-political environ-

* "Mystics Rather Than Rationalists"; Johanna Burton, in *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*; edited by Donna De Salvo. Tate Publishing, 2005.

** *Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism*; Mel Bochner; Internet source.

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

ment of that time period; namely, concerns with mass production and consumer conformity as well as issues of identity and gender. In fact, Burton argues, conceptual art of the late 1960s sincerely mirrored the formal and technological concerns of the time. Burton writes, "[Solipsism] magnifies not the structure but the terms appropriated — by whatever means — to deny its existence."* ›

Although there may not be an immediate correlation between the aforementioned texts of both Groys and Burton, one cannot help but imagine a suitable medium for a successful solipsistic application in art today (the term "successful" is of course a relative one, but is used in this context as a system critique through system appropriation as described earlier). This "denial" through "appropriation" as put forth by Burton is vital to understanding the possible contemporary applications for solipsism, specifically as it pertains to Groys' text. If we are indeed biopoliticized, our lives constantly and artificially enhance through technological advancements, both medical and social; and this then is mediated and re-mediated, arguably from birth. Who then is truly aware of this? I would argue almost no one. And I would also argue ignorance is akin to denial. ›

That being said one can see a clear and logical parallel between Burton's assertion of system "appropriation" and Groys' notions of "art as documentation", which I propose clarifies the leap made by Groys from the artist as a biopolitical being to art as documentation; that it is in fact a solipsistic system appropriation.

II RECKONING

At the end of her essay, Burton acknowledges artists such as Jeremy Deller and Seth Price as contemporary torchbearers of solipsism. Both artists make personally subjective works in a distinct system critique. As seen with Deller in his socially charged work *Memory Bucket* (fig. 1), or his 2001 re-enactment *The Battle of Orgrieve* (fig. 2) where, as Virginia Button describes, "Deller's aim is to draw attention to activity taking place on the fringes of the mainstream, from forms of self-expression linked to vernacular or folk culture to overlooked events that he feels warrant a reappraisal."** Price also subjectively discusses his concerns through a system critique. For Price, however, the critique is geared toward the art world as a system, which he often accomplishes through "traditional" artistic methods, as seen in his work 2004 *Different Kinds of Art* (fig. 4). ›

These artists may at first not bear a straightforward resemblance to Groys' argument for art as documentation. However, I would disagree. If we appropriate this term to include a solipsistic understanding of

* "Mystics Rather Than Rationalists"; Johanna Burton, in *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*; edited by Donna De Salvo. Tate Publishing, 2005.

** *The Turner Prize*; Virginia Button; Tate Publishing, 2005.

documentation, then the definition of documentation can be expanded to include the documentation of not just art in general but of also the personal in art. One can stretch his exposure of "art as documentation" into not just a political act but into a personal or solipsistic act, since the personal as we have seen is automatically politicized, according to Groys' definition of the biopolitical. ›

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My logic is that access to, and a growing dependence on, new computing software and greater access to satellite-based information has altered the way we move in the world. In the last ten years it has become possible, and even necessary, to access information on an international and spontaneous level. In the last six months alone it has become possible to buy airline tickets and make purchases through eBay on your cell phone. Chat rooms and email have replaced landlines as a primary source of communication. Cellular telephones have become indispensable and growing access to webcams has altered pre-existing definitions of time and space. I am not interested in the specific technological aspects of these changes, but instead in how this has changed contemporary art production. On a philosophical level I believe that life is becoming more transitory. We are almost never in the place we are, but instead always reflecting on the place we came from or the place we are going to. The "moment" is disappearing and converting to a perpetual state of transitions. This of course is not a new realization and may be seen as a symptom of every new generation of the past hundred years, as technological advancements push us and have been consistently pushing us toward an ever-tighter form of global community. ›

As artists then, how do we make sense of this? I propose that an expanded definition of art documentation allows for a visual critique of these transitions. This critique however will ultimately remain subjective. This solipsism or subjectivity will by its very nature produce a myriad of artworks, from the more image-based work of artists such as Deller and Price, to artists such as Jem Finer and the team of Mark Hansen and Ben

• Mark Hanson and Ben Rubin, *Listning Post*, Mixed media, 1999

•• Jeremy Deller, *Memory Bucket*, Video still, 2003; fig. 2

••• Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave*, Video still, 2001; fig. 3

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

Rubin, who critique and document these transitions more literally. ›
Jem Finer's *Longplayer, 2000* (downloadable at www.longplayer.org), which is a musical composition digitally composed and programmed to play uninterrupted and un-looped for one thousand years, and *Listening Post, 1999*(fig. 4), developed by Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin, is a collection of mini-screens streaming passages from Internet chat rooms in real time. Both these works directly address time and the forced transition between life and technology. Both *Listing Post* and *Longplayer* have created viable artistic works in an international and contemporary context without producing a static gallery-based work. The art in many ways is continuous and evolves with the social climate it is based on. This, for me, severely alters the notions and role of art and artist. Because the work is kinetic and dependent on outside elements, it becomes impossible to fix these pieces in a specific time and place, relieving the artist of a "finished" signature-based work. As a viewer, it becomes necessary to pre- and post-visualize the context of works such as these because they offer no immediate finality. The artists relinquish control of a final image and instead allow the viewer the opportunity to experience the work as it is being made. This in my opinion also alters presupposed definitions of art as object, and instead opens up meaning to include, quite literally, the physical aspects and conceptual implications, of both time and space. ›

Although the five artists mentioned share no immediate similarities, I will attempt to work through their differences and draw out a common thread. Both Deller and Price make work through a personal solipsistic subjective critique of their own systemic concerns. Finer, Hanson & Rubin however do the opposite; through a literal system appropriation, via technology, they make statements that include their own political and social commentary (even if they have removed their own personal subjectivity from the physicality of their work). Finer's thousand-year composition will obviously outlive him and everyone alive today. Hanson and Rubin, by choosing to focus on live Internet conversations that reveal the day-to-day concerns of the masses with open-ended subject matter and uncontrolled content, implicate the viewer in its production, and by default themselves. These I would argue are also personal and conscious decisions. ›
So then, what can we infer from these initially opposing art methodologies (Deller and Price/ Finer and Hanson & Rubin)? I would suggest that they accomplish similar goals but simply from opposing ends. Deller and Price utilize a solipsistic subjectivity for system critique, and Finer and Hanson & Rubin appropriate a system as a critique on their subjectivity, or lack thereof. As I have said, the deliberate removal of their person from the content of the work is still a personal decision. ›
Although I have only used the four above named artists and works, I would argue that this analysis could be applied to most (if not all) contemporary artworks. Simply put: All art is documentation, and all art production is subjective. ›
This statement may seem remedial at first. However, if we remember and apply Groys' assertion of the biopolitical as the technological "redefining of life" to "pure activity" for his arguments for art as documentation, and Burton's subsequent argument for the inevitable solipsism of a system critique, we can quite lucidly assert that in fact all art is a documentation of this pure activity that is our biopolitical life, and prone to the solipsistic mediation of our experiences in this life.

III REVELING

"All art is documentation, and all art is subjective"; I will admit this assertion offers little to art criticism per se. However, it does provide a helpful look at art production, with which I am primarily concerned. I will also admit that I have made some generalizations and leaps that some readers may find questionable, but as an artist and not an art theorist I feel that it is my right and privilege (I would even go as far to say it is my duty) to draw conclusions that clarify my own artistic practice; which I will attempt to do now. ›

• Seth Price, *Different Kinds of Art*, Mixed media, 2004; fig. 4

• Heino Schmid, *Via Someon Else's Mounth*, Video stills, 2006; fig. 5

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

Via Someone Else's Mouth (fig. 5) is my most recent work and this will be a retroactive view of it in the context of the points I have presented in this text thus far, namely as a subjective documentation. I use the term retroactive and not retrospective purposefully, as I want to make a clear distinction. Whereas retrospective implies a fixed context in the past, retroactive by definition implies a past context that spills into a present. This work is not yet installed and is thus unfinished. However, I feel that I am in a position to consider it in the context of the arguments I have presented. ›

The work began quite simply with an exchange initiated with Fine Art students from MaHKU and MFA students at The Slade School of Fine Art in London. An artist, Tim Stevens, included a clay mold of his teeth to be used somehow in a work by a student here in Utrecht. Tim ultimately chose to no longer participate in this exchange, but I felt compelled nevertheless to work with his submission. After weeks at looking at the clay object that represented his teeth I started to naturally wonder what he looked like and what kind of person he was. These questions heightened the personal connotations of the mold as an object for me. I began to consider teeth as a source of identity, and thought that it may be interesting to somehow bite Tim with his own teeth, to imprint him with his own teeth, which is a reflection of his identity. Unknown to me at the time, Vito Acconci did a similar experiment with himself in his work *Trademark* (fig. 6), a series of photographs where he subsequently bit himself in different areas of his body. The title suggests a similar concern to my preoccupation with identity. "Trademark" is of course an advertising term denoting a "corporate" identity. Acconci uses it to suggest a branding of himself with himself. For me, it was important from the beginning that I be the one to wear his teeth and that he be bitten in a place otherwise inaccessible to him. This was not in response to Acconci's work for I was not made aware of it until well after the deed was done. This came out of my own interest for the work. In fact, as the project progressed and the inevitable problems began to surface with making the second mold for me to wear, several key elements began to emerge that I felt could not be compromised, namely my own interjection in the work. For example:

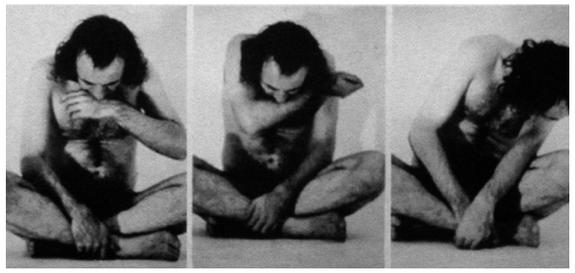
I Tim's jaw was significantly smaller than my own, which made creating a wearable second mold extremely difficult. The parameters of his jaw, as reflected in his mold, had to be extended significantly to allow me to wear the mold.

II I felt strongly that the interior of the mold should be literally fitted to my teeth, not a blank surface that you see on the inside of dentures, but the mold should hold an accurate impression of my own teeth, so that I would be the only one able to wear them. This was a difficult task to accomplish but even after it was done the problem of Tim's jaw size made exuding pressure through the mold extremely painful for me (akin to wearing braces), however those teeth indentations were, I felt, necessary.

III Temporality was important. The work had to exist as a document. That bite mark would heal. All that would be left of the action was the documentation.

IV I did not know Tim. And yet I was adamant that our first introduction be within the context of this work.

V Again, I did not know Tim. Why do this?



The concerns I had with the work were primarily based in notions of identity. A person's teeth are the second most common form of identification next to the fingerprint.* Primarily I was interested in the dichotomy of the bite as an identical physical impression to be imposed from an external source (me in this case). However, as the project progressed, it became clear that there was more going on; my physical imposition into the project, namely the need to wear the teeth and have them fitted specifically to me so as no one else could wear them, required that I considered the implications of these impositions. Myriad issues arose, namely concerns of not only identity in the social sense (teeth as comparable to fingerprints) but also issues of intimacy, the mouth of course being a highly personal part of the body, how we communicate and ingest. Other concerns were the interpersonal connections of the biting as an act. Was it violent? Was it sexual? Was it both? All these things of course require a personal interrogation of the event. ›

This interrogation is a separate issue. The point I am trying to make is that a personal decision was made, and this decision is evident in all art produced, and begins with a question. Where do I fit in? It may

* *The Online Guide to Human Bite Marks*, Internet so

• Vito Acconci, *Trademarks*, B&W Photographs of a performance, 1970; fig. 6

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

take other forms but it remains essentially the same, and produces work from the extreme removal of the self (i.e. Finer's *Longplayer* and Hanson & Rubin's *Listening Post*), to the intermediate personal interjections and critiques of both Deller and Price, to the direct and visible inclusion of a solipsistic viewpoint as in my work *Via Someone Else's Mouth*. No matter how a work is produced, from the outside in or from the inside out, the successful artwork is created by a moment of critical reflection on this art production, where the implications of both become clearer, i.e., a mirroring of the self to the social and back again, and vice versa, a mirroring of the social to the self and back again. Naturally, this all depends on an artist's working method, but its undercurrent is clear and I believe unavoidable. Art production unavoidably pertains to both the personal and the social. ›

Now, I will concede that this may seem self-explanatory, and even a given in art production. However, until I was able to put my most recent work into the context of the text by both Groys and Burton I did not understand its implications. Solipsistic documentation is ingrained in all contemporary art production. The self is thoroughly biopoliticized through the mediation of the simple act of being alive; this mediation does not erase the self and its influence on visually discussing this mediation as artists. Although I always knew this, I did not understand. I do not wish to undermine all the work I made prior to this point, but the successes of those pieces were arrived at purely intuitively, without the right questions being asked at the right time. *Via Someone Else's Mouth*, however, has been the most clearly produced. It was made not by idealizing or post or pre-visualizing, but by understanding the consequences and relationships in life as a shared experience. Your own subjective mediation of those experiences is where I believe good art is made. The distinction is that knowing only serves as a recognition, which I was able to do in other people's work, whereas understanding serves as a basis for application. And so, since the title of this chapter is "reveling" I will allow myself a moment of emotion and say, that after more than ten years of studying and practicing art, I finally understand what I'm doing.

Public Domain According to Corporate Colonialism

kilian idsinga

In the year 2000, the average person saw 3000 advertisements every single day, for a total of 10 million by age 18. 75% of all teenagers had their own television set. One out of three had a computer in their room and spent approximately two hours a day online.* We live in an information age where accessibility to information is a must. Who are the providers of that information? Can we trust the information given to us? Are we part of a dialogue with the providers of information, or are we solely subjected to it? These are the questions I asked myself before I started to work on this essay. The result is a critical piece in which I try to provide an overview of how the information age is structured. ›

The accessibility of information makes our society into what and how it is right now. The easy access to information feeds our knowledge and, at the same time, feeds our hunger for that knowledge to grow exponentially over time. It is not only our "quest" for knowledge, but also a "quest" for companies to keep in touch with their consumers/users. This relationship between the multinationals and consumers/users is changing at the same rate as our society is changing. I believe this development is in need of a closer look to decide whether it is in our best interest or not. ›

On any given day of the week I find myself using my environment to gather information. This happens consciously as well as subconsciously. In the Western world, everyone might know how to gather information consciously. Gathering information subconsciously is a little more difficult to explain, or even to grasp in some cases. Go to a festival or concert and you will find corporate sponsorship everywhere. Listen to music and you will discover artists referring to specific products they especially like, or are paid to like (e.g. Rolex, Cristal, Nike, etc). There are more possibilities to market one's product on a subconscious level, for instance through subliminal messages. These messages cannot be seen through conventional ways of perception. For example, imagery or texts can be placed in music or movies to manipulate the audience. During World War I, the term subliminal message was popularized when America was drafting soldiers. Until recently, research findings did not support the conclusion that subliminal suggestions have any effect. In 2006, Dr. Johan Karremans at the University of Nijmegen

* Goodman, 2000

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

discovered that if the message was goal-relevant, subliminal messages may be effective.* ›

I am not claiming that companies use these tactics to sell their products or services. I want you to think of these possibilities of manipulation before you read further. Nowadays a few big companies play the role of content and entertainment providers in our everyday life. They provide us with different services as well as a lot of products. Products can range from small items, like a cup of coffee, to things we definitely cannot live without, for example clothing. Services are more in the realm of entertainment and can be as broad as the production of music, television, and movies, but also providing Internet access and organizing concerts. The world we live in is a world where the speed at which new products, ideas, etc. are being developed is skyrocketing. ›

One of the most important developments over the last few years is the dramatic decrease in the amount of owners of media conglomerates. At the same time, the amount of content output is increasing. What does "fewer owners" actually mean? It means that all kinds of media — publishing houses, movie production firms, television stations and so on — are owned by only a few conglomerates. In 2003, for example, the big players were, in order of net worth: Time Warner, Vivendi Universal, Walt Disney, Viacom, Sony, Bertelsmann and News Corporation (www.freepress.net). Some of the companies can be recognized immediately as producers of entertainment, like Time Warner and Walt Disney. A firm like News Corporation, on the other hand, is mostly specialized in the production of content such as magazines and newspapers. Entertainment is about the production of merchandising as well as the production of music, movies, theme parks, and so on. A theme park, however, is a product you cannot buy in the way you buy a CD or a pair of shoes. It is an experience, just like concerts are, and forms a third category of output. I will re-divide the media landscape into: entertainment production, experience production, and content production. ›

A great tool to see how the different conglomerates are intertwined is the 2004 database www.theyrule.net. To give you an idea of this website's philosophy, here is the pre loader: "They sit on the boards of the largest companies of America. Many sit on government committees. They make decisions that affect our lives. They rule." The board of a company is a group of people serving as the decision making body. The website allows its visitors to make connections between the different companies, as well as check out what other visitors have done. To give you an example: How are Coca-Cola and Viacom (owner of MTV, Paramount Pictures and others) related to each other? According to the website: Samuel A. Nunn, Jr. sits on the board of directors of Coca-Cola as well as on the board of Dell Computers. William H. Gray III is also a member of the board at Dell, but has a position at the board of directors at Viacom as well. So, Viacom is only two board members away from Coca-Cola. When you think in terms of advertising this is a scary idea. Talking to the rulers of MTV to play Coke commercials more often, cheaper or during prime time is in this case very easy. ›

Maybe this is a paranoid approach. But think about it. Companies which, at first glance, have nothing to do with each other, practically share the people running them. This is even the case sometimes with companies who to the outside world appear to be competitors. In 2001, United Cinemas International (UCI) was owned by Viacom and Vivendi Universal via a joint venture (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/giants/viacom.html). Are Viacom and Vivendi competitors? I am not so sure anymore. If these are the important companies within the media landscape, then maybe every product can be linked. Let's look a bit closer. Think of every conglomerate as a breeding ground for different, smaller companies. A conglomerate is the owner of, for example, publishing houses. These houses publish a broad range of magazines. Each magazine can be seen as a brand in itself, linked to one publishing house, linked to a conglomerate. Still no issues in sight? What if you would be aware of the fact that next to a music magazine, the same conglomerate owns a music label? Think of what kind of information the magazine will give about a new CD, produced by a label which is owned by the same conglomerate. ›

Let's take a look at how the production of the three previously mentioned types of output — content, entertainment, experience — takes place, and what dangers are hidden in this production. A good example maybe one of the best of how the synergy works within the media conglomerates, is a concert broadcast by MTV, and talked about in the documentary Coolhunters.* The concert was a showcase of different hip hop and rap artists. The entire happening was sponsored by Sprite. Initially it was the kick off party for Sprite.com. This means that the Sprite logo was everywhere. Then the entire audience was "hired." Kids were paid $50 apiece to show up and look cool. Another shocking element is that the concert did not happen in the way it was portrayed by MTV. It was a show, but as a regular visitor you could not get in. The concert was a huge advertising campaign for the artists, Sprite and MTV (for being the only station to broadcast it). MTV had become an "all news bulletin" for creating brand images. The station is a global catalogue for the modern branded life.** ›

* New Scientist #2549, 28 April 2006, p.16

* Goodman, 2000

** Klein, 2001

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

The MTV showcase portrays corporate sponsorship as a rather new step in advertising. Big brands are linking their actual name and brand value to important social and cultural events, so as to attach the positive atmosphere of the experience to the sponsoring brand. It can also be a sports event or a way of advertising in itself, like the “Starbucks experience”, Nike Town or the Virgin Megastore. In these cases, they produce an image, an experience, instead of a product. This results in brands becoming their own experience. “Brands produce meaning.” Swatch is about the idea of time, Nike is about the idea of sports. The brands create a destination, and the consumer wants to be taken on the journey towards that destination. ›

Take Swatch as an example. In the context of creating a “lived reality”, they made Swatch Beats (www.swatch.com/internettime). It is a global Internet time. Your place on the planet does not influence that time, so you do not have to consider the different time zones. In other words, the global village has a global time now as well. This development has, in my personal view, almost no negative aspects to it. The only thing is that we are supposed to start living in actual, branded time. Walt Disney created an even bigger “lived reality” in developing Disney World. If you go there, your intent is the entertainment value, but the experience value takes over pretty quickly. Instead of “creating the experience”, you can also read “creating the destination.” And that destination is what the big corporations try to create. ›

For a long time, corporate sponsorship seemed to be the solution to reach the customers, who were sick of the overwhelming and intrusive advertising of the previous era. Sponsorship made huge events possible, because of the enormous corporate funding the events received. Next to this positive effect of sponsorship, something else happened. Brands started to invade the public space more often, and changed the openness of that public domain. The word itself explains its intention and its public. It is for everybody to use, enter, and explore; think of public squares or parks. We as a public are used to seeing billboards everywhere we go. “A walk around the street may as well be a stroll through a mall”.* Brands conquered the public domain with these signs and billboards, in the same way brands are fighting to get teens to buy their products. Weapons used to win over the biggest and most important group of people there are more teens now then baby boomers are movies, music, fashion, the Internet, and so on. Signs and billboards are weapons used to claim physical space, and corporate sponsorship is the latest weapon in the colonizing by the multinationals. Public space is privatized as soon as corporations sponsor events in public space. ›

* Goodman, 2000

A nice example of this switch is a sponsored concert in Toronto in 1997. Anti-tobacco activists were forcibly removed from the town’s public square Nathan Phillips Square, just in front of the Toronto City Hall because they handed out critical material to visitors of the open air du Maurier Downtown Jazz Festival. The public space became property of the tobacco company as soon as they sponsored the festival.* What this example shows is that brands are invading our physical space to make sure the consumer’s mind set is directed towards their brand. This reminds me of regimes which try to force their belief systems upon their citizens. ›

A side effect of corporate sponsorship is that the fans and visitors of particular events started to detach themselves from the event. The authenticity of the event is not the same after the brands take over. This resulted in sponsors losing the positive vibe between the event and its audience, and thus the vibe with the brand itself. Somehow there is always the idea in the heads of consumers that the brands do what we as consumers want them to do. Actually we are the puppets of media. The question the media asks itself is not, “Where do you want to go today?” but “How can I steer you into a synergized maze of where I want you to go today?” One could argue that the ability to make more elaborate choices has grown, due to the increase and availability of products. Are we actually able to make choices? If we buy a cup of coffee, we are in a Starbucks experience. If we buy sneakers, we go to Nike Town. It seems choices are already made for us before we arrive at a point where we can choose. Choice implies freedom and “freedom without opportunity is a devil’s gift” (Noam Chomsky). That’s exactly what’s going on. We pat ourselves on the back for being free. We think we have freedom of speech, action and choice. But who has the power when only 21 nation states can compete with the top six corporate leaders? ›

All these examples together demonstrate a fake idea of openness and a fake structure of empowerment in the information age. The reality is that the controlled environment we live in prevents us from learning the truth about all of the above. This kind of manipulation or influence can be found in another field of communication: the documentary. In making documentaries, there is an important issue which can be compared to our relationship with media in general: how to portray issues of public interest. If certain events are of importance for, say, public safety, how far can one go in terms of breaching one’s privacy? The discussion is framed in terms of the public’s right to know, right to hear, right to receive information and ideas, and so on, thus a discussion about public interest is by its very nature tricky. The

* Klein, 2001: 185

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

concept of “right to know” addresses the difference between a right to speak which is unambiguously the right of free expression and as such enshrined in many jurisdictions for centuries and a right to hear.* ›
The rights we take for granted are problematized in the ethical and moral boundaries of making documentaries. We should ask the conglomerates the same questions they ask the makers of (critical) documentaries. The idea of what a documentary actually is, or represents, is nicely stated by Brian Winston, referring to John Grierson when he states it is “the creative treatment of actuality. Documentary encompasses the use of images of the real world for the purposes of personal expression”.** For the conglomerates to survive, the style of documentaries had to change. Documentaries had to be fast and cheap to be able to compete with regular television before documentaries were a cinema event and they did. The documentaries stayed expertly structured, but the shooting style changed. More and more they became a variant of the Direct Cinema “follow the subject” and the newly discovered fly on the wall concept. ›
Not only are documentaries creative representations of reality, but by making the step to television they also became products for conglomerates to sell. This resulted in owners wanting to have control over what they were buying from documentary makers and selling to their customers. They demanded detailed scripts, which gave the conglomerates that control. This left no room for improvisation, ad libbing or “off the cuff” shooting, which gives many documentaries their strength.*** One should realize that those means of censorship are close to home. Broadcasters often say they have a responsibility to their viewers, that the audience expects certain content — called “the contract with the viewer.” By stating this as the defense for content regulation, they oversee the notion, amongst others, of the public’s right to choose. Deriving from this is the friction between freedom of speech and “protecting” the audience from harmful content, the keyword being “harmful”. Who decides what is harmful? Because documentaries have become products, taste now often is the element which overshadows the choices broadcasters make, resulting in the fact that it masks the potential control over controversy. So in the end “harmful” might be about harming ratings, and making money instead of harming the “tender” audience. The interpretations of the different rights I mentioned have become a linguistic game with high stakes. ›

As I said before, freedom in its essence is based upon the ability to make your own choices. We have seen how entertainment and experience production have invaded our public space physically. Content

* Winston, 2000: 66
** Winston, 2000: 20
*** Winston, 2000: 51

production, on the other hand, leaves us with many opportunities. Instead of having a physical public space, we have a more mental public domain of information and content. This requires a state of mind, and is, therefore, harder to grasp for both the multinationals and us as consumers. For the purposes of understanding cultural production, the public domain could be understood as the body of works that we have access to in order to create newer works.* The beautiful thing with content production is that we as consumers, especially in the last few years, have become producers as well. The opportunities given to us through, for example, the Internet provide the “battleground” for collaborative artists, thinkers, activists and so on, against transnational companies. We can become “equal” partners of the big conglomerates. But the established content producers do not want anybody else but themselves in that realm, so their control over us as citizens and users of the public domain shifts from experience and entertainment production towards content production. ›
We have seen how branding has taken over our public space. To gain control over content, the following has happened in terms of a similar synergy. Content companies, like film and book producers, are leaping into distribution. Distribution networks, like phone and Internet providers, are leaping into content production.** The result, just as with entertainment production, is that the diversity is decreasing. By we have seen that the multinationals have a strong determination to ensure ownership of brands. The latest development, the experience of content, needs a similar approach, if the conglomerates want to stay in control. The big question here is: How do they manage to keep control over all the content out there, on the Internet, small publications, etc.? The answer is, by using copyright and trademarking as proof of ownership. ›
Copyright was initially created as a way to regulate the printing industry in the 18th century. During the Renaissance, printers throughout Europe would reprint popular books without obtaining permission or paying royalties, until copyright made regulation of reprinting possible. With the emergence of the concept of artistic genius, copyright became enmeshed with the general cultural understanding of authorship. With globalized capitalism, control over copyrighted works became centered in the hands of media conglomerates instead of authors and artists. Copyright explicitly allowed (and still allows) public libraries to exist as an alternative, non commercial distribution channel for cultural works. One could say that, over time, the idea of regulating the publishing industry mutated into regulating its customers, artists, and audiences.*** The following examples come from the booklet

* Liang, 2004: 33
** Klein, 2001
*** Liang, 2004: 10, 13

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

Guide to Open Content Licenses by Lawrence Liang. This booklet is published under a Creative Commons license; Attribution, Non-commercial and Share Alike - but more about this later. ›
Authorship, originality, and copyright are of no or little relevance in virtually all traditional forms of popular culture all over the world. Most folk songs and folktales, for example, are collective anonymous creations in the public domain. Variations, modifications, and translations are traditionally encouraged as part of their legacy. Literary works typically render themselves canonical by not inventing new stories, but rewriting existing ones, such as the many adoptions of Faustus, from Christopher Marlowe to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Fernando Pessoa, Alfred Jarry, Thomas Mann and Michel Butor. In music you can see the same thing happening. Musical themes were freely adapted and copied from one composer to another. Even as late as the 19th century, Beethoven did not have to buy a license for writing the Diabelli Variations, 83 variations on a waltz written by the Austrian Anton Diabelli. And finally, the entire genre of Blues music is in fact a variation on only one song, the twelve-bar harmonic scheme. Copyright was also a non issue in the visual arts until recently. Renaissance and Baroque paintings were to a large degree collective workshop productions, and recycled conventional, emblematic, and pictorial motifs. Rubens and Rembrandt were the most prominent practitioners of the workshop method, with author attributions of their work unclear until today. In 1921, Kurt Schwitters called his own brand of Dada "Merz", derived from the logo of the German bank "Commerzbank" which he had used in a collage painting. ›
Despite the fact that our huge and important cultural heritage is the result of artistic collaboration, sharing of knowledge and improving existing works, companies found a reason to commercialize culture, which I previously described as content. So what happened to literature, music, and visual art when the conglomerates decided to come out and play? Walt Disney Corporation, for example, founded much of its wealth on folktales, such as Snow White and Sinbad, by taking them out of the public domain and turning them into proprietary, copyrighted films, and merchandising. In 2003, a young artist named DJ Danger Mouse remixed an album called Grey Album from the Beatles' White Album and hip-hop artist Jay Z's Black Album. When only 3000 copies were released, DJ Danger Mouse received a cease and desist letter ordering him to stop further distribution of the album since it violated the copyright of the Beatles' White Album, owned by EMI. The case of graphic artist Kieron Dwyer shows what happens now in visual art due to content control. A year after Dwyer made comic

books, T shirts, and stickers with his version of the Starbucks logo, the company sued him. When the case was settled, Dwyer was allowed to continue displaying his logo, but only in extremely limited circumstances. No more comic books, T shirts, or stickers: he could post the image on the web, but not on his own website, nor could he link from his website to any other site that shows that parody (www.illegalart.org). ›
These examples show that being "equal partners" in content production is pretty much the same as the idea of "openness" and "ability to choose" within the production of entertainment and experiences. We are promised one thing, but we get the opposite. In the name of protecting the brand from dilution, artists and activists who try to engage with the brand as equal partners in the "relationship" are routinely dragged into court for violating trademark, copyright, libel or "brand disparagement" laws.* The development of the Internet and, thus, the growth of the public domain raise questions about the control by the content owners and their influence upon the creative process. Public interest in having free availability and flow of information in the public domain is constrained by the fact that content owners shield off the use of information. Participating in creating cultural content, which can improve public knowledge, creativity and general growth, without the fear of being sued, is made almost impossible. The late French Romantic poet Lautréamont wrote in a famous passage of his 1870 book *Poésies*, "Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it. It closely grasps an author's sentence, uses his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with a right one." Plagiarism is still frowned upon by most artists: even inspiration becomes a threat in our current situation of content regulations. The way "the greater good" opens doors in creating documentaries, but content owners try to close every door imaginable in terms of content production by the public. ›
Besides the intrusion into the public space, the idea that content is turned into property is the scariest among all the developments in the media landscape. Can we actually prevent these developments? I would be lying if I said there is a possibility to replace the current situation with something new, like total freedom of content. This type of freedom can be seen in terms of "free of cost" and in terms of "free for everyone to use." Total freedom cannot exist without a way to still make a living from the work we do. So, somehow there has to be a manner for the two extreme options to co exist. Am I the first person to come up with this idea? No. ›
Institutions like Creative Commons think that the current developments will determine, in the near future, how we think of creativity, either in terms of property or in terms of collaboration. Even if the

* Klein, 2001

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

original creators want others to make derivative works out of their original ones, the owners of that content, the multinationals, do not allow that without explicit permission and a giant fee for the owners. To make sure creative minds have even harder access to content, copyright laws have changed in recent years. Originally, copyright expired after fourteen years. As late as 1977, the term was 28 years with the option to renew for another 28. But now the term lasts 70 years after the death of the author and 95 years for corporate authors. The ever lengthening copyright term seems to be having the opposite effect from what the constitution intended.* To create some sort of counterbalance to these extreme copyright laws, Creative Commons (CC) was founded. They believe that a large and vibrant public domain of information and content is essential for sustaining creativity, and that there is a need to proactively enrich the public domain by creating a positive rights discourse. They do so by creating a set of licenses to enable open content and collaboration, as well as by acting as a database for open content.** Every producer of content can use CC licenses so they can decide for themselves what others can and cannot do with their work. The three main concepts of each license are: attribution, the right to be identified as the author of the work, commercial use; the ability for the creator to choose whether others can make money from the work or not; and creation of derivative works, which allows the author to determine if others can make derivative works. In Version 2 of the CC licenses "attribution" is a default rule. ›

Creative Commons is not the only group alarmed that our intellectual property is at risk by how the conglomerates operate. CC is part of an ideology which is called "copyleft." It applies the principles of free distribution, usage, and collaborative development to all kinds of media.*** This challenges the traditional idea of an artistic genius sitting and creating something out of nothing. Instead, it builds upon the notion of a collective, producing work, where the actual work is more important then the author(s) who made it. Remember Lautréamont's idea about plagiarism? The laws I mentioned above prevent us from working in that collaborative manner. "Freedom without opportunity is a devil's gift." It still applies. And it is not like this applies only to creative minds like designers and writers. Disputes around file sharing, for instance the Napster case, brought the fight against copyright laws into the living rooms of ordinary people. The Internet has changed everything by creating a platform with which the idea of the user producer (a user who contributes to an existing work, becoming a producer as well) could be taken to the next level. The creation of a derivative work is, in my view, not a prerequisite in the user producer

* Aoki, Boyle, Jenkins, 2006: 44, 45

** Liang, 2004: 78

*** Liang, 2004: 18

philosophy. Writings, imagery, music, and movies, which all can be found on the Internet, are also meant to trigger our imagination. It can make you think about a specific situation in our society, it can provoke a discussion. If only one would think in these terms, that an extensive flow of content in the public domain, available for everybody to read, view, listen to, is important for everybody, not just for creators of "new" content. ›

Take this essay for example. Much of the information I gathered came from books which are available on the Internet for free. So what am I complaining about? Apparently there is ample information to be had, but the additional information I obtained about one of my biggest inspirational resources, the 2002 movie Equilibrium directed by Kurt Wimmer, would have been more easily accessible if it had been circulated freely. The movie tells a story about a world were having emotions is forbidden; those who express themselves or try to enrich their knowledge by reading a book are arrested and executed. This movie made me realize that the corporate leaders in this world are basically doing the same. Okay, they are not killing us physically, but they are killing our curiosity, our hunger for knowledge, and our creativity by manipulating what kind of information we receive and by making sure that their monologue directed at us endures. ›

The Internet is one of the most important battlegrounds in the fight for freedom of information. The user producer can already be found there, trying to find its own place in that relatively new public domain. Even making online radio and television happens more often. InsuTV and Candida in Italy are great examples of Internet broadcasting. Instead of Berlusconi's propaganda television, these two communities make television by the people for the people. Most of the software they use to create the broadcast is open source, which strengthens the collaborative aspect. It did not take long for the transnational companies to discover the increased power the Internet could provide. Recently, companies like Burger King and NBC have discovered video sharing websites like GoogleVideo and YouTube to post their own videos with novel ways of product placement. NBC, one of the companies relying on copyright and trademark laws, uses imagery from the Internet to help create their programming. NBC uses footage from the public domain, makes a derivative work and sells it, via Bravo/ NBC product placement, back to the public. Just as in physical public space, they are intruding upon and privatizing parts of the "mental" public domain consisting of content production and transforming that into property, suing us when we are trespassing. ›

I can imagine that you might think I am overreacting. Don't get me

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

wrong. I like those video sharing websites as much as the next person, and frankly I am not that concerned about the obvious product placement, because most people nowadays are too smart to get tricked into those types of advertising. That is my prediction anyway. But I am concerned about what the future will bring. So, my concern is about how the distribution of information takes place, how the media structure is built, how content regulations try to prevent us from learning from stimulating content, and how we are not allowed to take part in a dialogue. We are not killed physically with guns because we have emotions, express ourselves, read a book, or watch a movie. We are killed metaphorically as soon as copyright, trademark, and brand disparagement laws become the weapons of choice for the conglomerates to prevent us from speaking out about further branding, from criticizing corporate colonialism, and from opposing further intrusion into the public domain. ›

Within the physical, public domain there are different movements that try to be part of the dialogue, for instance Reclaim The Streets (RTS). This movement reclaims space which is polluted by both car fumes and corporate branding. RTS is part of a bigger philosophy, namely "Culture Jamming", the practice of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to radically alter their message. The idea is that concentration of media ownership has successfully devalued the right of free speech by severing it from the right to be heard.* This brings the physical and non physical public domain together. Culture Jammers write theory and critique on the streets, the only place where content can be free. ›

Thus, brands are taking over public space, every space imaginable is being privatized and we are not allowed to enter, unless we follow the rules the brands come up with. That form of privatization we can see directly; we can even point at places were it happens. However, in the realm of content production, privatization is harder to discern. One has to read between the lines; one needs insight in the corporate world in order to be able to understand how the owners of content try to manipulate and control the distribution of information. One could argue that the control over authorship and ownership of content could be one of the last possible fights left against the corporate oppressors. So, I would say, let the content owners and possible collaborators know that you will not take it anymore. Let's take information and content into our own hands. A revolt doesn't have to last forever and become a revolution. It only has to last long enough to get noticed and understood.**

Kilian Idsinga, *Selection of stencil-art in the public space, taken down by the police after two days*, 2006

* Klein: 2001, 280

** Bey: 1991

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Symposium Out of Focus

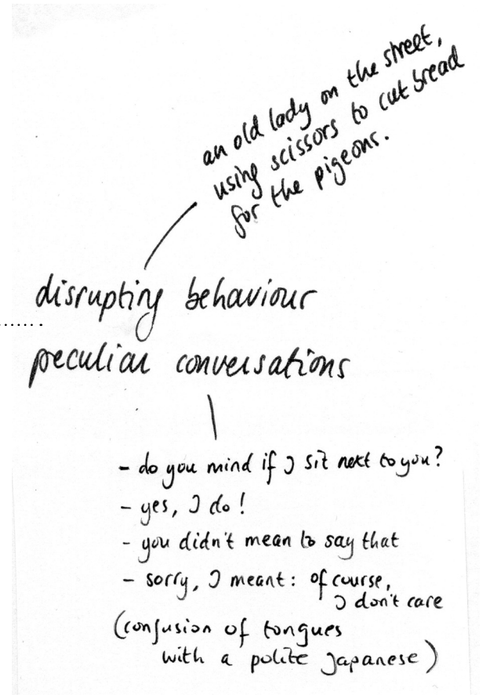
karien van assendelft

PICTURE THIS

In Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the imam, who found sanctuary in London, goes out on the street to get some fresh air, " at the centre of a square formed by eight young men in sunglasses and bulging suits, he folds his hands before him and fixes his gaze upon them, so that no element or particle of this hated city, (…) can lodge itself, like a dust-speck in his eyes."*This image is intriguing because the imam not only refuses to witness and contact the outer world, but he himself is also blocked from the view of spectators by the bodyguards surrounding him. And as long as the audience does not really see him, it can ignore his existence. At the same time, the unusual behavior of this group of men, neatly dressed, with mirrored sunglasses, shuffling closely together across a rainy street must draw everyone's attention.

THE RIGHT PERCEPTION

Are we aware of all the sums of discourses** that stand between our unarmed eyes*** and their surroundings? What is it that triggers our attention? Which aspects play a role in deliberate or unconscious blindness? How does that influence the way we communicate? And what exactly do we see? These questions arose from my fascination with disruptions in sensory perception. For the last two years, in the framework of my MaHKU Fine Art studies, I have studied aspects affecting attention and blindness in perception and how to use these in my work on (mis)communication. This research culminated in a symposium for which I brought together scientists and artists from diverse backgrounds. The symposium *Out of Focus- thoughts on attention and blindness*, took place in June at Expodium in Utrecht. In the company of a broad and curious audience, a beamer and an overhead projector, we embarked upon a quest, starting at the basics of sensory perception, through the mediated gaze, to application of insights and even using these to mislead the viewer.



* Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 1988

** Norman Bryson, "The gaze in the expanded field" from *Vision and Visuality*, Hal Foster (ed.), 1988

*** Walter Benjamin, *"The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction"*, 1936

SYMPOSIUM

[margin: SPEAKERS

JAN KOENDERINK Professor of Human Perception, Department of Physics of Man, Utrecht University. In collaboration with Ans van Doorn, physicist Jan Koenderink developed methods for quantitative research into the perception of pictorial space (shape and space in two-dimensional imagery).*

= shape and space in 2-dimensional imagery

PETRAN KOCKELKOREN Professor of Art and Technology, Department of Philosophy, University of Twente and lecturer in Art and Technology at ArtEZ, Institute of the Arts. Philosopher Petran Kockelkoren has written on the history of the mediated gaze in relation to art.**

BARBARA VISSER visual artist (videos, films, installations and photo works), studies the way photography can manipulate and color the gaze. Currently, an overview of her work is on exhibit at Museum De Paviljoens in Almere.

WILLEM WAGENAAR Professor of Cognitive Psychology, University Leiden. Wagenaar is an authority in the field of eye witnessing, whose expertise is often used in the courtroom.***

VERBAL VERSUS VISUAL LANGUAGE

Right from the start, the speakers brought up the concept of verbal communication and its shortcomings. Jan Koenderink mentioned the problem of terminology that led him to develop innovative optical tests; subjects physically mark on a screen how they experience optical space, instead of having to put this into words. Petran Kockelkoren began his lecture by challenging the prejudiced view that verbal language has played a more important role in cultural development than visual mediations. In his opinion, our culture is mediated by optical instruments. Willem Wagenaar strongly opposes the method of face recognition on an abstract verbal basis. He pleads for a visual language of resemblances to describe faces: not "curly beard, narrow eyes" but "like Arjan Robben but slightly different." He also warned that perceiving differences in faces requires names and verbal categories to begin with.

camera obscura,
microscope,
television

BODY, SENSES AND (THE RIGHT) DISTANCE

What role have technological developments such as microscopes, trains, and airplanes played in training our sensory perception? An initial reaction to new modes of perception is often a *de-centering*. Kockelkoren used Schivelbusch's**** book on traveling in the 19th century to explain train illnesses: afflictions caused by disorientation. When first traveling by train, people could only *look* at a landscape instead of

decentring =
when you don't know
what to make of a situation
and you're tipped off balance.

* Jan Koenderink, Ans van Doorn, "Pictorial Space", from *The Visual Neurosciences*, L. Chalupa and J. Werner (eds.), 2004

** Petran Kockelkoren, *Technology: art, fairground and theatre*, 2003

*** Willem Albert Wagenaar, *Dubieuze zaken* (with H. Crombag), 1992 *Vincent plast op de grond. Nachtmerries in het Nederlands recht*, 2006

**** Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey. Trains and travel in the 19th century*, 1986

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

being part of it, thus lacking the sensory experiences. "The body has to accommodate these new cultural conditions," says Kockelkoren. Koenderink added that train travelers first perceived the landscape on the wrong scale. The idea of the landscape in their minds did not correspond with what was outside. Only by experience and repetition is our brain system calibrated and the perception corrected: re-centering. ›
Alongside this example of *physical* distance, there is *mental* distance to take into account. We have the ability to look at the real world as if we were looking at an image. Barbara Visser demonstrated this with a photograph of two people sitting on a beach, looking straight past a drowned African man lying in the sand. Visser stated, "It seems to me that these people think they are looking at an image, and do not see it is real. For me it represents deformed perception."

it's not for no reason that motion and sensations are based in the same part of the brain!
↓
(needs further investigation)

ATTENTION

Barbara Visser: "Once your attention is on one thing, it is very difficult to see the flipside at the same time." The movement of a viewer's eye is usually directed by the conspicuous part of a scene. [margin: con·spic·u·ous
I easily or clearly visible
II attracting attention through being unusual or remarkable* From research into cognition, we know your brain cannot register something of which you are unaware: "However well-constructed a sensory perception may be, it is meaningless until the brain recognizes it."**
So, our attention is caught by something unexpected that we cannot recognize for what it is. Probably the strongest version of attention is tunnel vision, "in which the surrounding field is screened out."***
In police terms this is called weapon focus: all attention is narrowed down to a detail on eye level, resulting in an accurate description of the attacker's Adam's apple.

APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY AND THE VERIDICALITY OF PERCEPTION

A striking difference in point of view concerned the veridicality of perception.
[margin: ve·rid·i·cal adj (formal)
I telling the truth
II corresponding to facts or to reality, and therefore genuine or real8]
Willem Wagenaar: "Perception is an activity. It is creative. It is related to our senses but far more to what we already know." Wagenaar explained which aspects play a role in perceiving and recognizing people, and how alarmingly often we rely wrongly upon our senses

* Oxford Dictionary
** Rita Carter, *Mapping the Mind*, 1998
*** Norman Bryson, "The gaze in the expanded field" from *Vision and Visuality*, Hal Foster (ed.), 1988

and memory. When observing a scene, a vast range of different types of blindness and misinterpretations can obscure our perception, after which our memory constructs its own reality. Our brain is constantly misleading us, yet we keep relying on it. A witness will indisputably believe his own eyes. And all too often, so will the court. Wagenaar gave some rather shocking accounts of convictions based upon false eyewitness reports. ›
In physicist Koenderink's opinion there is no truth in perception, because "perceptions we have are not specified by the input. They present themselves to your eyes, but they are not representations of the outer world." Koenderink's research into perception incorporates the beholder's share: "The viewer is free to look in different ways (at pictorial space) and to take different viewpoints." No observer is the same. "All viewers see differently and all are right." He adds, "Although I think this is more interesting for philosophers than for our type of science." While showing her videos and photo work, Barbara Visser explained, "In my work I strive to deceive and manipulate the audience, but not to simply trick them." She reveals the mechanism that manipulates the viewer, in so doing not focusing upon a "true" perception and memory but more on the effect on and interpretation by the viewer. In Wagenaar's field, however, finding truth is a matter of life and death. Barbara Visser asks, "Does it matter if what you see is true?" Willem Wagenaar replies, "Yes, when you could get the death penalty, it does matter."

for example: tiredness, blindspots, lack of interest, prejudices, ...

* Rita Carter in Mapping the Mind:
"Perception is no faithful reflection of the outer world, but a unique construction"

AFTER IMAGE

So, looking back on this interesting meeting, do I now know everything about the right perception? [margin: examples] The discussion raised more questions than answers and I can only say that now I am more aware of the interface between me, my eyes, my mind and the outer world. [margin: in·ter·face
I the surface, place, or point where two things touch each other or meet
II a common boundary between objects or different phases of a substance
III the place, situation, or way in which two things or people act together or affect each other or the point of connection between things
IV a common boundary shared by two devices, or by a person and a device, across which data or information flows, for example, a computer screen
V software that links a computer with another device, or the set of commands, messages, images, and other elements allowing communi-

CONDITIONS FOR THE RIGHT PERCEPTION:
- use body and senses
- take different viewpoints
- be fit and well equipped
- keep the right distance
- close one eye
- take a focused position

bullshit!!

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

cation between computer and operator
VI an electronic device or circuit or other point of contact between two pieces of equipment8] Perhaps Barbara Visser described it most accurately when she said, “I’m hoping to reveal something about the strange workings of the eye and the mind.”

editorial
symposium critical methodologies
PAULINE TERREEHORST partners in science
DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN pro-activity in design
MARTIN BECK connector joints
STEFAN DILLEMUTH self-organized research
FLORIAN PUMHOSL contextualizing abstract language
DAVE HULLFISH BAILEY some notes on language in research
WENDELIEN VAN OLDENBORGH staging real situations
interview
ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF
essays
HEINO SCHMID a solipsistic argument of art documentation
KILIAN IDSINGA public domain according to corporate colonialism
research reports
KARIEN VAN ASSENDELFT report symposium out of focus
JORIS LINDHOUT review chronology (daniel birnbaum)

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