

We educate one another

Welcome to We educate one another, our presentation of the Rietveld Research Residency. The Rietveld Research Residency is a joint initiative of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and the Mondriaan Fund. It offered us the opportunity to focus on a research project for a year. In 2012 we were affiliated for two days a week with the Sandberg Institute, the master program of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy.

To round off our residency we will give an impression of the research and present some of the plans we developed within our research. We will also introduce some of the key people we met during the research. We view them as new intermediaries in a new type of art practice. Building new connections is the main topic today. Coming from the field of art in public space, we have come to the conclusion that, at this moment in time, the interesting challenges are to be found in very different areas. Our approach and our ambition to influence social issues requires a whole different context and completely different intermediaries.

The ongoing economic crisis provides fertile soil for social transition and new forms of collaborative practice. In order for these collaborations to come about, a new type of intermediary is needed. The apparent conflict between different worlds seems to stand in the way of solving urgent social problems. In order to understand one another's words, another language needs to be designed, one which can build a bridge between, for example, the world of art and that of care for the elderly; between social design and the financial sector; between free art and real estate. There is a need to educate one another. To make a start with this, in our research we seek out comparisons between our own art practice and the practices of behavioural therapists, philosophers, conjurors, transition-managers, idealistic admen, and illustrious figures such as the politician Antanas Mockus – one-time mayor of Bogota who facilitated increased traffic safety by retraining policemen as mime artists.

The apparent insolvability of many important (socio-economic) issues can be traced back to the inability (or refusal) to *really* change ones behaviour. Artists and social designers can be capable of reframing societal issues – on the basis of which, new perspectives for taking action can arise: Artists make alternatives both visible and tangible.

Completely different types of assignment lie over the horizon, dissimilar from those which have thus far been issued, in relation to art in public space. The new intermediaries can play an important role in terms of these assignments. That's why we are introducing:

Mieke Moor. She is a philosopher and organisational advisor with management consultancy Twynstra Gudde who specialises in issues concerning basic knowledge of 'organisation': the human ability to manage the everyday chaos of reality. Much of our daily activity is dominated by the business of organisation – through policy planning, strategy memorandums, organisational charts, we attempt to get a grip on the complexities of our world, create an overview, and master the risk factor. Often, within this organisational mania, little space is left for an awareness that, what is 'really important', is actually impossible to organise. Much of value is dismissed within the paradigm of usefulness. Within the healthcare system, for example, the 'violence' of organisational mania is palpable. Moor has investigated this theme comprehensively in her 2012 PhD, expanded into the book, 'Between the lines. An aesthetic view on violence of organization', a daring book about the relationship between art and work.

Our second guest is:

Anita van de Looij. During the course of her study in Transition Expertise (Veranderkunde), she developed a new method in which she utilised artistic interventions to tackle organisational issues. She investigates the characteristics of artworks situated on the border between art and organisation(s) and is working on a book on this topic. She has been, among other things, head of Sustainability, Energy and Environment for the city council of Tilburg.

Our third guest is:

Sjoerd ter Borg. He studied political science at the University of Amsterdam and, together with Anne Janssens, formed a creative project bureau. Following that, he was part of Vacant NL at the Sandberg institute and conducted design-based research into temporary uses for empty buildings. This led to the plan 'Uitgeverij van de Leegstand' (Empty Property Distribution). Together with Mattijs Voordenberg, he recently made a documentary about the future of student activism. During his political science study he frequently discussed the topic of 'wicked problems'. Ter Borg thinks that it is precisely designers who should be involving themselves in these societal problems, because policy is always written from one particular perspective.

And our fourth guest is:

Tabo Goudswaard. He is a social designer. He graduated in 2009 from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, from the department of Fine Arts (DOGtime). He develops artistic strategies for (bogged down) social issues. He is currently structurally affiliated with Geen Kunst (it translates roughly as Art-Less), which is *part* of the larger *Twynstra Gudde* consultancy bureau whereby artists and advisors work together to achieve the greatest possible impact on societal issues. Goudswaard is also the initiator of public research project SocialDesignForWickedProblems – it is within the framework of this investigation that we are working on the societal issue 'financial unconsciousness' which was submitted by ING Insurance/Nationale Nederlanden.

Shortly, each of them will show in a ten minute presentation of how they, each in their own way, act as translator and guide between the world of art and the world in which they usually operate. Then later on we will discuss their views about the collaboration with artists concerning various social issues. What is the added value? Is it possible to pin down a particular method or are certain methods to be avoided? Which role do they see for themselves as an intermediary between art and client? Can they already see the beginnings of a new 'in-between language'? How does one convince patrons of the importance of working with artists on issues of social importance? Etcetera.

I would also like to mention **Peter Hop** who unfortunately cannot be here with us today but who certainly deserves a mention as he has been an important key figure for us. Peter has been involved for years with issues concerning the field of 'innovations in care'. Geared to, and driven by, developments in society, he continually attempts to hook organisations into innovative thinking about organisation within care and welfare facilities. Alongside paying attention to the areas of production and control, according to Hop, organisations should offer space to artists and surrounds-analysts in order to remain in connection with what is happening out there in the surroundings.

The research

"What exactly is your research about?" Already in the first week of our stay at the Rietveld and the Sandberg we were being confronted with this question. The glass-walled studio which we were offered as workspace made this question even more compelling – there was nowhere for us to hide.

It's really not an unusual question, when one is doing 'artistic research' – to ask what the subject of the research is. Yet the word 'exactly' really got to us – and would continue to do so. In the struggle to answer, an important difference became apparent, in comparison with fundamentally scientific research. Our research was far from systematic – rather, it had the characteristics of an essay.

According to the definition of the essay in Wikipedia, 'The essayist gladly makes connections which would be absolutely unthinkable within a specialised scientific field.'

As counterpart to the maxim 'to show is to know', artists have always been somewhat contrary connectors. In this way, artistic research is very different from the research being done at the university – and this is where the hidden treasure is buried.

There was most definitely a red thread running through our research. The material we explore now begins to fall into place in actual projects. In retrospect we could describe the route we followed thus:

Disenchantment with the traditional exhibition model led us, during the nineties, to take public space as our work terrain. The scale on which we worked changed constantly. In our documentary *The Expansion of the Mastenbroek Polder*, a polder encroached on the city and after the credits had rolled, the film seemed to find a continuance in real life, the result of which was that farmers developed a positively offensive stance. The topsy-turvy world suddenly appeared to be a viable one. In the project *Saudade*, a pile of builders' sand that smelled of the sea, near the entrance to the new neighbourhood Houten Zuid, transformed into a fragment of a dune landscape. We had 84 writers on the banks of the Lemmer-Delftzijl canal, writing, in the space of one day, the *Biography of the Canal*, and we gave a Japanese geisha the assignment to appear before windows of the inhabitants of a residential care home in Utrecht Overvecht in a window cleaner's gondola.

Because so many art commissioners had no idea which way to go with art in public space, there was a huge amount of room to experiment. But was it art in public space we made? Looking back it was 'Social Design' *avant la lettre*. Although Social Design is also not really the right designation – I'll come back to that later. As relative 'outsiders', we researched links within society, from schools to residential care homes, from new towns to polders. We went in search of the specific 'angle' of the place. We made an intervention, temporary or permanent. Through the interventions, inhabitants or users were able to see themselves, their surroundings, or the problem they were dealing with, from a different angle. Sometimes it led to a change in behaviour. Often things occurred that we had not anticipated. All our projects transcended the place where they were executed and through this, they broached larger societal issues. We didn't offer a solution, but we played a game with reality which had unexpected results. Gandhi put it into words beautifully, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

The impetus for works of art in public space were often banal – they were simply related to the places where money for art could be generated: new town neighbourhoods, renovation projects, government buildings, infrastructural projects. We managed to bend those 'banal' impetuses into plans with a catch and an inner necessity.

When the demand became more frequent, and the authorities began to divert new artistic activities in public space to fit into their own policies, working in this context began to feel uncomfortable. Some politicians or commissioners of art works began to see art projects in public space as being a way to lubricate a narrowing of the 'divide' between them and the citizens. Space for experiment disappeared. Community art became the

magic word. We were unable to feel comfortable in that genre, particularly because it seemed to have the intention to reinforce rather than question the identity of the inhabitants.

We had fled to art in public space in order to escape the artificial exhibition circuit. Now it seemed that 'art in public space' was no longer the right context to execute projects.

And perhaps it never had been.

This was a disturbing line of thought in an early stage of our research. In our research we discovered that we were missing something in the construction involving art-commissions and intermediaries who had been educated as art historians. The framework within which our projects were being viewed, didn't tally. Because of this our projects were sometimes sidelined as 'just art'. When our film *The Expansion of the Mastenbroek Polder* had a follow-up in real life, and thus had an impact on a societal question, the Province of Overijssel, shocked, announced that it was above all, an art project.

If we are not artists in public space, what are we then? What is the right context? And who are the right middlemen?

Initially we thought that we would have to change something in our work method in order to enlarge the impact of our work.

We wondered – should we develop into a 'communications office', employing unusual ways of putting societal issues on the agenda, on the cutting face between art and the applied arts? And if so, what can we learn from organisations outside the field of art who are debating these issues? And what can they learn from us? Can artists capture a niche for themselves where organisational advice bureaus and PR and marketing companies leave a hole? Is art coming off second-best because commercial and political actors set the scene and are gaining more and more grip on the world and on public opinion through their knowledge of behavioural psychology and the use of social media? We need a counter-attack to behaviour-driven advertising and personalized promotion. We could adopt their strategies and hurl them back like a boomerang. At this stage of our investigation we thought about the possibilities of using these same psychological behavioural insights for idealistic goals, art projects with social impact,

Sometimes the dividing line between socially engaged art and idealistic advertising is extremely thin. We looked into the strategies and visual language of idealistic advertising, the ways in which companies and multinationals use design to define their role in society, and we compared these with the strategies of artists, documentary makers and politicians such as Antanas Mockus, the former mayor of Bogota, who hired 420 mime-artists to make fun of traffic violators, because he believed Colombians were more afraid of being ridiculed than fined. Absurd behaviour changes strategies with incredible results – a politician as a social designer.

In the project *Fora & Fauna* that I developed for the exhibition festival *Ja Natuurlijk/Yes Naturally – How art saves the world*, which took place in and around the GEM Museum for Contemporary Art in The Hague, I further investigated the grey area between art, communications and idealistic advertising. I organised a writers marathon on Facebook and Twitter in which 16 writers from various backgrounds (philosophy, biology, literature) crept inside the skins of a plant, an animal or an object, in order to examine reality from that perspective and to give a sharp edge to the discussion on the relationship between culture and nature. For *Yes Naturally* I worked intensively with Lieke Timmermans on communications, and Martine Willekens, PR. We educated on another. Social media is being used in art presentations purely as a promotional tool – I

wanted to use social media as a platform for discussion, so that the essence and theme of the art manifestation *Yes Naturally* would be analysed and debated. Indirectly, this debate was 'promotion' for the exhibition.

Fora & Fauna began with Esther Gerritsen in the starring role as *Welwitschia mirabilis* (Tweeblaarkanniedood), a plant that can grow to be 2,000 years old. Her contribution produced discussions with followers about immortality and about the relationship between man and plant.

Philosopher Ann Meskens discussed 'as vacuum cleaner' with her followers about the relationship between man and thing. Why do we 'stroke' our smart phones and tablets and not our vacuum cleaners?

Maria Barnas as dry rot was forced to defend herself straight away, because a follower who was himself troubled by dry rot couldn't understand how Maria could describe this inconvenience so aesthetically via her poetic tweets.

During the exhibition, *Fora & Fauna* was represented through 16 low-tech smart phones. Visitors could scroll both mechanically and analogously through the twitter messages that writers had posted.

Within our Rietveld Research Residency we also looked at the field of work of change-experts and organisational advisors. We began reading management literature and books by behavioural psychologists. We discovered that behavioural psychologists sometimes undertake absurd investigations that come close to being artistic interventions in social issues. One is unlikely to find the management book *You too can learn to manipulate – control over yourself and others (Manipuleren kun je leren, controle over anderen en jezelf)* on the shelves in the art school. In order to develop an in-between language, we thought we first needed to decipher and understand this literature.

Throughout a large part of the year we spent time with Anita van de Looij who studied transition management. Through her we gained entry into the world of transition managers and behavioural therapist such as Martin Appelo, who is extremely sceptical about behavioural change and has even developed a formula for it. Via Anita we also met Mieke Moor. In return we took Anita with us on visits to artists.

In the contact with Anita, the idea that we were educating one another really began to evolve, and we saw that there was certainly added value in it. By developing an in-between language we learned to understand one another's expertise better. We didn't become transition experts, and Anita didn't become an artist, but it became more and more clear that the sum of our expertises could enlarge the impact of art on societal issues. In this way it could get a much more radical grip on the subject matter.

We developed the concept for *The Night Service*, in which we investigate the sub-consciousness of organisations and companies. The idea is that we spend a night in an organisation or company without ever meeting the employees. When everyone has gone home we inhabit the empty office chairs, log in to the intranet, and seek for the dreams which have remained unfulfilled by day. We commit small interventions on the work floor whilst the workers sleep, and we make a report of our quest in a 'shadow book-keeping'. As daytime's counterpart, the night is an excellent time to reflect on organisational issues and existential questions on the work floor. What is the meaning of work? Why do we do what we do? How do we relate to one another? Art can be a catalyst for things which otherwise remain unspoken.

We consider good follow-up important. We don't do this ourselves – our night-time presence should remain a mystery. Anita van de Looij makes sure that the reactions to our night-time interventions are canalised and that the effects of such an intervention can grow into something sustainable within an organisation.

That was something we often missed in projects which we executed in the context of art in public space. They ended abruptly – the art project was executed and that was it. The budget had been used up. Whereas actually it was just beginning! But nothing was translated into a next step. With this we don't want to imply that

we have now suddenly started to work very purposefully. On the contrary, it remains our task to disrupt. But together with the knowledge and skills of other intermediaries, we can get much further using trial and error than is currently the case. We are not content to see our work 'sidelined' as art and everyone cheerfully proceeding to just carry on as normal following an intervention.

In the project SocialDesignForWickedProblems' – of which Tabo Goudswaard is one of the initiators – we are being promoted as social designers.

Are we all of a sudden social designers rather than artists in public space?

In this research project we have been linked up with the insurance company Nationale Nederlanden. Before I explain something more about the method that SocialDesignForWickedProblems propagates I would like to tell something about our collaboration with Nationale Nederlanden.

Financial awareness is high up on Nationale Nederlanden's agenda. The term appears in a great number of policy papers. But what does it mean? What role can Nationale Nederlanden play as far as societal problems concerning financial awareness go? And how financially aware are the 6.000 employees of Nationale Nederlanden anyway? How does one turn that phrase into a more concrete *conversation piece*, and how can one involve employees of Nationale Nederlanden at an early stage, so that it becomes more deeply felt in the organisation? We developed a number of suggestions to make the phrase more tangible. The suggestions cover a wide spectrum, from the concrete and practical, the philosophical or absurd, to the futuristic.

We concluded that, among other things, financial awareness is too much, and too often, about money and financial knowledge, and not about people's motivations and their needs. The financial services sector suffers from financial autism. Another mindset could lead to a totally different relationship toward money and goods. Imagine, you have strong financial awareness, you have carefully arranged everything, including your pension, but in later life your circle of friends has diminished. You are lonely and even become depressed (depression is an increasing problem among the elderly). What use is your money then? Granted, if your finances are not sorted then the situation will be worse, but can you buy company? Can you insure against loneliness? What things are crucial for our well-being?

Whilst financial education is absolutely necessary, we would like to contribute to the discussion on financial awareness by, just this once, not discussing money. To this end, we want to approach all 6,000 employees of Nationale Nederlanden with two questions:

Who or what would you like to insure against, for which there is (as yet) no insurance?

What can you yourself do to insure yourself for it?

In this fashion we want to be able to reveal what the employees really consider important in their lives, what their motivations are. It shows that one can think in a very fundamental manner about what insurance actually is. It lays bare uncertainties – but also ones own responsibilities. We challenge the self-learning abilities of the organisation. It brings a very different human scale into the mega-company that is Nationale Nederlanden. And it can lead to very different kinds of insurance products – in kind.

Insurance companies ask us to think about our pension, but how visionary are insurance companies? Can they actually see 30 or 40 years ahead? How far does their empathic ability reach? It is precisely bankers and insurers who seem to look only a short way ahead, the whole reward system and policies are based on short term scoring.

Meanwhile technology marches forth. Microchips inserted under the skin, or a sensor tattooed on a tooth can warn a doctor in case of emergency. The first cyborg on earth is a fact – working together with scientists, Neil Harbisson developed the eyeborg, a camera that transforms colour into sound and brings it to the ear via bone-conduction. The Fin Jerry Jalava, who lost half a finger in a motorbike accident, had a prosthesis made containing a USB-drive. The blog *Next Nature* published reports daily about futuristic inventions. If all this is possible, what kind of repercussions does it have for our financial awareness? Would young people be encouraged to think about their financial future if it were packaged in sexy, future-tech surroundings? What does it mean for our financial awareness if we are fused with computers? Imagine that we could be made really financially aware through a bodily reaction? Imagine that you would get goose bumps for over consumption or would become literally 'in the red'...

It would take too long to sketch the entire process. If you want to know more about this research then I cordially invite you to come on December 3rd, when the interim presentations will take place in Pakhuis de Zwijger in Amsterdam.

Returning to... Are we all of a sudden social designers instead of artists in public space? The public research of *SocialDesignForWickedProblems* wants to make social design into a recognisable and manageable method, give a stronger methodological base to the practice of social design, and to facilitate the connection between the value systems of artists and those of other parties in society such as governments, businesses and other organizations. Although we wholeheartedly agree that social design deserves more visibility and resonance, we question whether a methodological basis is the best way.

Time and again our expertise is formulated differently: Artists are good at thinking out of the box. Artists think 'around' things. Artists reframe social issues and create new approaches and perspectives. This latter definition, which comes from the pen of *SocialDesignForWickedProblems*, we might well rate as the best. Yet, it remains a methodical interpretation that never fully reflects our disruptive practice. And is methodology really necessary in order to better sell this art practice?

Ultimately during our Rietveld Research Residency, we discovered important answers through the work of two authors. The books of Jaap Boonstra and Mieke Moor reinforced our impression that our anti-methodological 'strategy' might just be really productive.

'More than 70% of the transition programmes in organizations either get bogged down prematurely or else fail to achieve the intended result,' says Jaap Boonstra, professor of 'Organizational Change and Learning' at the University of Amsterdam. Planned change is not sufficient in a dynamic environment filled with ambiguous issues. He introduces a new approach to change, based on the chaos theory. 'Organizations are on the border of stability and instability. Unstable situations lead to creativity. Organizing, innovating and learning are dynamic processes in which people interact and communicate. This type of change has no clear goals. It's an open procedure. It goes beyond planned change. It's like walking on water.'

This sounded to us like a definition of art, and it stimulated us in thinking about the possibilities for art to play an important role in these processes. When 70% of the change programmes in organizations fail, art can fail better!

In her book *Between the lines – An aesthetic view on violence of organization*, Mieke Moor writes, 'The strong need for control makes it difficult to be open to that which lies somewhere, hidden beneath that control, and precisely that is what we are desperately searching for – such as 'real quality', and a 'good conversation'. Probably many people also feel that you cannot organise such things, and that many of the really important things in our existence take place between the lines.'

Through the disruption of art, we are reminded of our uncertainties, and of that on which we have no grip, says Moor. Art does more justice to life's capriciousness. Art, by definition, is not just another behaviour-influencing-trick within an organization, it touches on something substantial that cannot be translated into methods and formulas. So, we are not the latest transition gurus. The time is ripe for art, because art has not renounced life. Due to the ongoing crisis, the burden of suffering has become so intense that more and more people seem to be open for it.

With Peter Hop, who started off in nursing, became director of a nursing home, and is now active as an advisor in the field of 'care renewal', we found the ideal intermediary. With Peter we are starting a new project at ORO, an organisation that offers care to people with Down's syndrome or autistic spectrum disorder. The context of the assignment is an institutional terrain in transition, in which outside society is becoming increasingly more intertwined with the world of the inhabitants, whereby you can, of course, immediately begin to question who really has the learning difficulties. A large number of behavioural psychologists have pointed out the fallibility of our reasoning. We consider ourselves to be rational beings, but we just muddle along...

What makes this assignment so different from others? It's not an art assignment. And there is no art commission. We don't have to deal with a designated art budget, but with a realistic project budget. We are immediately gathered around the table with all those involved in the transition of the institute's terrain. We are able to immediately delve deeper into the organisation and the material. The stakes are higher. We owe that to Peter's expertise, Peter knows this world through and through. At the same time, he sees the disruptive value of art. Peter detests institutions that observe the neighbours' renovation and then, out of a lack of creativity, simply copy it.

Someone with knowledge of behavioural psychology can add extra value to art projects, but if one takes it even further, and really delves deep into the content, we think it's possible to take it all a step further. There, where art in public space ends, new territories can be exploited.

In short: we think that this form of co-creation can offer a fantastic new future to artists and designers who want to apply themselves to societal issues. That's why we have also invited Sjoerd today. Because we think that a political scientist who is educating himself in the arts is going in the direction that we should all be taking. We have to educate one another if we hope to get to grips with current societal and economic problems. The research doesn't end here, today. We have a long way ahead of us.

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