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Gerrit Rietveld Academie

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22/23-04-2010

A Wedge Between Private and Public

A Symposium on Interactivity and Public Space

The two-day symposium A wedge between private and public looks at interactive art in public space from the perspective of three core concepts: object, interface and affect. On day one, theoreticians discuss and expand on these principles, while the second day focuses on three case studies. The symposium creates a clear connection between the theory of interactive art – often considered from the discourse of new media – and the practical aspects involved in commissions in the public space. The symposium is a follow-up to Research into the functioning of interactive art in semi-public space organised by the Lectoraat Art & Public Space of the Rietveld Academy commissioned by SKOR.

Affect, interface and object are fundamental to interactivity and its use in artworks. Keynote speakers Robert Pfaller, Alexander Galloway and Willem van Weelden will discuss these notions, followed each time by responses from two speakers (from the world of contemporary art and new media). The case studies which are the focus of the second day, explore how these notions relate to concrete works of art made in commission situations. Two projects will be used by way of example: one for a rehabilitation clinic (a new start for Aernout Mik's work AAP) and one for paediatric and juvenile psychiatry centre (a 'work in progress' by Daan Roosegaarde). In the third case study, artists Martijn Engelbregt and Roel Wouters look at 'undesirable' interactivity.

Participants include: Alexander Galloway, Johan Hoorn, Erik Kluitenberg, Klaas Kuitenbrouwer, Geert Lovink, Geert Mul, Gijs van Oenen, Daan Roosegaarde, Christa Sommerer, Steven ten Thije, Ronald van Tienhoven, Roel Wouters, Martijn Engelbregt and Willem van Weelden.

Thursday 22 April from 10.00 – 18.00 (doors open: 9.30)

Friday 23 April from 10.30 – 18.00 (doors open: 10.00)

Trouw Amsterdam, Wibautstraat 127, Amsterdam

Entrance: € 25.00 per day /students € 15.00 (incl. lunch, coffee, tea)

Registrations: wegde@rietveldAcademy.nl

Language: Day one: English. Day two: Dutch

[Click here for information on Onderzoek naar interactieve kunstwerken in de semi-publieke ruimte \(a study in Dutch on interactive works of art in semipublic space\)](#)

Program:

Thursday 22 April – Affect, Interface, Object

Session 1-Affect

The affective register of our sensory-based thinking and acting tends to be subjected to habits and verifications.

Since Modernism, art has been calling for a reassessment of this register and the problematising of sensory perception per se. This driving force, this vehicle of sense to consciousness is, therefore, anything but a clean slate that, by definition, ensures the overturning of rigid patterns of experience and ushering in of new conditions of awareness, given that in many cases this register has been made subordinate to the colonisation of the habit-based sensory arsenal. This is evident when new art forms, which challenge this register and its canonical status (including new media art), evolve and is certainly the case in an age when perception is increasingly automated and taken over by (perception) technologies. As, at the time, the camera not the photographer took the photograph (Flusser), now the robot-directed hand performs brain surgery, aided by a feedback system based on artificial intelligence. The design and production of such systems increasingly encapsulates the sensory, subjecting it to interpretations based on 'scientific' measurement results. In many cases, the sensory as a means of exploring potentialities becomes the last stop in the settlement of trial and error within this technological doctrine of application. This technocratic subjection of the sensorial domain not only inherently limits the sensory as such, but the technologisation of the senses also acts as a coercive subjectivisation regime. In brief: we perceive as instructed by our self-devised apparatus. An explanation with affect is impossible without an analysis of this technocratic turn and studying this new representational regime of the 'human condition'.

The principal question is whether, as a public interaction strategy, art has the capacity to break through the affective register that has become colonized by the technological paradigm.

Speakers: Gijs van Oenen, Eric Kluitenberg, Geert Mul
Moderator: Jeroen Boomgaard

Session2 – Interface

The computational way of thinking that has become deeply embedded in our culture works to ensure that communicative acts are subordinate to a far-reaching protocolisation. The effect of which is to increasingly standardise social interactions and, with this, reduce the social. The ensuing structuring and objectivisation of communicative processes has largely resulted in thinking on communication and social interaction seemingly focusing on the conditions for access and accessibility. Providing access, the problematisation of making information accessible and with this the emphatic demarcation of the borders of social and symbolic spaces has become a social issue that seems to have sprung directly from the nature of computational thinking. Even in the earliest years of computing science, in terms of performativity and efficiency, the two crucial criteria used to assess communication processes, 'interfacing' was of vital importance. Parallel to the introduction of the PC in the early nineteen eighties, the computer industry felt compelled to socialise the computer and to divert its attention from a system-oriented technocratic analysis of the communication process to a social, semiotic analysis thereof, and the further development of systematic interaction thinking. This development radically altered the notion of a public space and in its theorisation immediately arrived at the communication-technological discourse on ideas of access, accessibility and symbolic interaction. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on the protocolisation of the mediation, there is generally little analysis of the way in which the mediation actually occurred. And, in as far as this area receives attention, it is frequently made secondary to the symbolic exposition with the mediation process. Theorising the practice of 'interfacing' is then simply a metaphoric not a political analysis of the provision of access, enclosing and disclosing. When we consider 'interfacing' as a social practice and cultural activity that not only gives shape to the democratic degree of social mediation but is also the material condition and expression of it, a political elucidation with 'interfacing' is vital for a reconsideration of public space.

Speakers: Alexander Galloway, Steven ten Thije, Christa Sommerer
Moderator: Geert Lovink

Session 3 – Object

“No animal can enter into relation with an object as such.” , Jakob von Uexküll

Since the advent of post modern thinking, considerable theoretical attention has been invested in the process of immaterialisation and the semiotisation of society and the economy. So-called immaterialism seemed a logical condition for a theoretical analysis of the information society. This also marked a departure from a strictly materialistic, Marxist analysis of the economy as part of the (legitimacy) crisis of politically committed thinking, and the search for micro-political analyses of power relations and the production of subjectivity whereby the exposition with symbolic transfer and the bestowal of semiotic meaning is considered more valuable than a strictly economic-materialist determinism. For some time, this processual research into information and communication flows, network thinking and symbolic analysis has, however, attained another materialistic perspective, owing in part to the ‘Actor-Network Theory’, a sociological method of studying relationships where emphasis is placed on non-human forms of agency. Another epistemology seems implicitly to lurk behind this ANT(ActorNetworkTheory) that sheds a fundamentally different light on the relationship between men and objects and the knowledge arising from them. The terms ‘speculative realism’ and ‘object-oriented philosophy’ guide this ethos, which is founded in the most formative insight brought forth by the 20th century, the concept of tool thinking. It is a re-introduction of a metaphysics that dissolves objects from their human input or usage, allowing them to exist in a world of their own. This anti-anthropologisation of the object proposes arriving at a radical recalibration of the interpretation of relationships between human beings and things.

In the analysis of interaction in the public space, a clarification of this new relational thinking about objects is of crucial importance.

Speakers: Willem van Weelden, Johna Hoorn, Ronald van Tienhoven

Moderator: Klaas Kuitenbrouwer

Friday 23 April – Case studies

Case 1. The reanimation of Aernout Mik’s AAP

In 1998 Aernout Mik created what, for him, was an unusual departure: a work in the form of a ‘life size’ mechanical orang-utan shown in a domestic setting with a fridge, a houseplant and so on, who can play noughts and crosses with patients. The piece was commissioned by the Sint Maartenskliniek in Ubbergen, where it functioned for a long time but, due to technical reasons (high maintenance and obsolete technology) has been in storage for some time. Efforts are currently underway to bring AAP back to life. AAP is one of a number of research projects being undertaken by CAMErA, a multi-disciplinary research institute at the VU University. CAMErA combines findings from artificial intelligence, physics and perceptual psychology to develop domotics and therapeutic robots in the care sector, among other things. What can we learn from the way in which AAP has functioned up to now, and how could ‘AAP 2.0’ work? What was and is the added value of the fact that AAP is a work of art?

Speakers: Johan Hoorn (CAMErA/VU), Fons Giesbers (Sint Maartenklinkiek)

Moderator: Nils van Beek (SKOR)

Case 2. Daan Roosegaarde’s work for the GGZ Breburg Groep, Breda (centre for paediatric and juvenile psychiatry)

As artist working explicitly with new technology and interactivity, Daan Roosegaarde is known for projects such as Dune in Rotterdam, an interactive landscape in the Maas Tunnel which adds a sensually waving layer of grasses to the tunnel’s existing architecture. For the centre’s new building, Daan Roosegaarde is currently developing an interactive artwork that will probably possess the qualities of a Tamagotchi. He is considering a modular system that could be situated at different locations inside and outside the building. The practical aspects of the commission mean that the final piece must be able to function in a setting where patients include many

children with autism and a range of other affective and personality disorders. How can the piece interact with them? The project is currently the design stage, and will be presented during the symposium. The findings of this case study will serve as input for future considerations by the various parties involved.

Speakers: Daan Roosegaarde, Marlies van Weelden (GGZ Breburg), Annet Dekker

Moderator: Tracy Metz

In many commission situations, an interactive artwork is required to have a specific kind of interactivity. It is often required to evoke positive behaviour or elicit a sense of wellbeing – contrary to ‘autonomous’ artworks, that can cause unexpected responses or add a disruptive element. This doesn’t mean that artworks in these situations always inspire purely positive reactions; in some cases, they bring about interaction outside the usual bounds. The work might evoke aggression, might be ignored or might cause an entirely new kind of interaction. What do these situations tell us about the limitations or new potential of interactive artworks? Are other kinds of interaction also possible in commission situations?

Speakers: Roel Wouters and Martijn Engelbregt, Johan Hoorn (CAMErA/VU)

Panel: Gijs van Oenen, Geert Lovink, Klaas Kuitenbrouwer

Moderator: Jeroen Boomgaard (Lectoraat Art & Public Space of the Rietveld Academy)

Nils van Beek is curator with SKOR in which capacity he is involved in both the reanimation of the work AAP by Aernout Mik and the Daan Roosegaarde project with the GGZ Breburg Groep.

Jeroen Boomgaard is Lector Art and Public Space at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and head of the Master Artistic Research programme at the University of Amsterdam. He publishes regularly in Dutch and international magazines on avant-garde issues, art and public space and artistic research.

Annet Dekker is freelance curator and researcher of exhibitions, discussions and workshops in the field of media art. She is programme manager with Virtual Platform and will soon begin her PhD research at Goldsmiths College, London.

Martijn Engelbregt is artist and designer and develops his projects from interactive processes that directly involve the public. He has worked on commissions including projects for the Dutch Lower House and De Balie in Amsterdam. Engelbregt lectures at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam.

Alexander Galloway is writer and programmer and lectures at the University of New York. He is one of the founders of software collective RSG; his publications include the books Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture and The Exploit: a Theory of Networks.

Fons Giesbers works for the architecture unit at the Sint Maartenskliniek in Nijmegen. In 1998, this rehabilitation clinic commissioned Aernout Mik to create the interactive artwork AAP, which was realised in collaboration with SKOR and is currently being researched by the VU.

Johan Hoorn is managing director of the Center of Advanced Media Research Amsterdam (CAMErA) of the VU University Amsterdam. He holds PhDs in literary studies and computer science; most of his work is cognitively oriented with a focus on creative technologies.

Eric Kluitenberg is media theoretician, writer and organiser of projects dealing with culture and technology. He has lectured in media theory at the University of Amsterdam and Academy Minerva in Groningen among others. He currently works for De Balie, centre for culture and politics in Amsterdam.

Klaas Kuitenbrouwer is programme manager with Virtual Platform. As artist he made interactive installations,

organised performance events; he has also made radio programmes for the VPRO and currently lectures at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam.

Geert Lovink is Lector Interactive Media at Amsterdam Polytechnic and is professor of New Media at the University of Amsterdam. He is the author of several books, including *Uncanny Networks* and *My First Recession*. Lovink is also director of the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam.

Tracy Metz is writer, journalist, part time editor of the *NRC Handelsblad* and guest researcher at Harvard Graduate School of Design. She is also guest lecturer and member of various juries in the area of architecture, art, landscape and spatial planning, and author of the book *PRET! Leisure en landschap*.

As artist, Geert Mul makes interactive video installations, among other things. His work has been shown at festivals such as the pop festival Lowlands and the International Film Festival Rotterdam; he has also undertaken a number of commissions such as the project for the Sofia Children's Hospital in Rotterdam and Middelburg town hall.

Gijs van Oenen is senior lecturer in philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam. His areas of expertise include ethics, the philosophy of law, political and social philosophy and the philosophy of man and culture. He also heads the Interactive Metal Fatigue research programme at the NWO.

Robert Pfaller is professor of philosophy and cultural sciences at the Universität für künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung in Linz and the Technical University in Vienna. He has authored a number of books, including *Ästhetik der Interpassivität* and *Das schmutzige Heilige und die reine Vernunft: Symptome der Gegenwartskultur*.

Daan Roosegaarde is artist, living and working in Rotterdam. He graduated from the AKI in Enschede and holds a master diploma from the Berlage Instituut in Rotterdam. His work explores the dynamic relationship between architecture, man and e-culture.

Christa Sommerer is artist and creates interactive computer installations in conjunction with Laurent Mignonneau. Both lecture at the Universität für künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung in Linz where they head the interface culture department at the Institute for Media.

Steven Ten Thijs is research curator at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and research fellow at the University of Hildesheim. He studied art history and philosophy at the University of Amsterdam.

Ronald van Tienhoven is artist and designer and also works as curator and advisor to organisations such as Stroom in The Hague and the Mondriaan Stichting; he is a guest lecturer at the Dutch Art Institute in Enschede. He currently lectures at the Industrial Design department of the Technical University of Eindhoven.

Marlies van Weelden is visual therapist and chairman of the art commission of GGZ Breburg Groep, an organisation for paediatric and juvenile psychiatry in Breda. The Breburg Groep recently commissioned a new artwork from Daan Roosegaarde, realised in collaboration with SKOR.

Willem van Weelden is researcher, publicist, artist and lecturer in interactive media. He is currently working on a book entitled *Designing Mediation*, which will be published as part of a series by the Institute for Network Cultures in Amsterdam.

Roel Wouters is designer and, among other things, makes video clips and interactive installations. His work focuses on the design of conditions rather on the final result. He lectures in interactive and graphic design at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and Yale University School of Art, among others.

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