

PhD Workshop

'Research Practices: Artistic, Art Historical and Anthropological Perspectives'

Location: KABK, Den Haag
Date: Thursday 16 May 2013
Time: 10:00 - 17:30

Speakers: Maruska Svašek
Lonnie van Brummelen &
Siebren de Haan
Lucy Cotter
David Louwrier
Larissa Mendoza Straffon
Irene Fortuyn
Italo Zuffi
and Anke Bangma

Chair: Sophie Ernst
Paula Harvey
Takako Kondo



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Programme

10:00 Arrival

10:15 Introduction of speakers and workshop by Sophie, Paula, Takako (15 min)

10:30 Key Note - Maruška Svašek
'Aestheticisation: Art and Beyond' (lecture, 30 min)

In the talk, I shall explore artistic practices and methodologies from the perspective of aestheticisation, defined as a dynamic process of hypercognition, emotional intensification and interpretative appropriation. This process relies on thinking and feeling human beings, who, through perceptual acts of multi-sensorial creative engagement and production, experience life-worlds, claim identities and situate themselves in social and political fields. Aestheticisation thus refers to the embeddedness of people in human and non-human environments, and investigates why some creative productions come to be perceived as 'art/istic'. The perspective will be used to discuss and raise questions about the Incomplete Thombu project, produced by the Sri Lankan artist T. Shanaathanan in 2011.

11:15 questions / discussion (chair Sophie) (10 min)

11:30 Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan
'Halen en Boeten' (presentation, 30 min)

Art is surrounded by an aura of autonomy, but artistic practice requires collaboration. As artists, we depend on colleagues, agents, sponsors, institutions, our own and host governments, and, of course, on you, the viewer. In a field of such complex involvements, one must often choose between conflicting interests, and sometimes friction is unavoidable. How could we get a better grip on this rather contradictory condition of being autonomous while being at the mercy of so many others? We consulted the fishermen of a former island who had managed to turn their loss of sovereignty into prosperity.

A common documentary practice is to single out relevant statements and rearrange them afterwards, during the editing. To involve the fishermen at an early stage in the selecting and repositioning of their words, we inverted this approach and made the montage before shooting the scenes. Is the outcome of such a procedure a work of fiction or a factual record? A scientist would not expect to be taken seriously if he mystified his methods or fiddled with results, but artists are, by and large, rather unwilling to provide watertight answers. This account of our artistic enquiry among the fishermen combines analogy and tinted transparency. Ergo, research swayed by aesthetics.

12:00 questions / discussion (chair Paula) (10 min)

12:15 Lucy Cotter
'Artistic Research: A Revolution?' (lecture, 30 min)

In *The Aesthetics of Silence* (1967) Susan Sontag argued that art is itself 'mainly, a form of thinking' and that 'each work of art gives us a form or paradigm or model of knowing something, an epistemology'. She concludes with the proposition that the task of the artist is in fact to try to help to give birth to the ways of thinking that we don't yet know about yet. If this is true, can we think about artistic research as a potential revolution in the ways in which we think and see in other disciplines as well as in the field of art itself? What can art think that cannot be thought through traditional academic lines of thinking? How does art hold knowledge? What does its materiality and image quality make possible?

In university-led debates addressing artistic research, the question has often been raised whether artistic research can reach the standards of academic research at large. It has been questioned whether artists can learn to write about their work and if so, whether or not it really makes a contribution in terms of knowledge production. But there are other questions to ask, such as whether artistic research can lure academic scholars out of their normative disciplinary and methodological modes? Can artistic research make a habitual reader look? Can it get the reader to see words? Can it convey materiality and maybe even the materiality of language itself? Can it make someone feel the body they read/look with? This paper will consider the possibilities of thinking about artistic research as heralding a potential epistemological revolution.

12:45 questions / discussion (chair Takako) (10 min)

13:00 Lunch break (30 min)

13:30 Larissa Mendoza Traffon
 ‘Scenarios of the adaptive function of art and aesthetics’ (10 min)

Over the past three decades, several scholars have approached art and aesthetics from an evolutionary perspective. They have argued that art is a universal human behaviour that should be explained in terms of the potential adaptive benefits that it could have conveyed to early members of our species in the remote past. Most prominently, three scenarios have been put forward as possible adaptive functions of art. The first suggests that art was selected as a strategy of mate choice in sexual selection. The second scenario, sees art as an instrument for social cohesion. And the third, understands art as an evolved human cognitive ability arising from the development of the human mind. In this talk, I will offer a brief critical assessment of these models in light of various lines of evidence from biology, archaeology, psychology, and anthropology. On this basis, I will argue that these three scenarios should be seen as complementary descriptions of a larger adaptive function. After some reconsideration of the evidence, I will sketch an alternative view of art as an evolved form of human communication. Finally, I will discuss the problems and prospects of studying art and aesthetics within the framework of human evolution.

13:40 Irene Fortuyn
 ‘THE GARDENER, it can be thought but can it be realised?’ (10 min)

The casus of my PhD research project NL-SCAPE is a visualisation of the relation between the landscape and the user/inhabitant/caretaker of the Dutch man-made functional/economical landscape. The research emphasises this relationship as essential for the existence of the Dutch landscape with the objective to reclaim a recognition and position for the man of the land in the design and maintenance on different levels.

I will introduce my research project against the backdrop of the theory of Pascal Gielen concerning the artistic practice. An artistic practice moves between four domains each with a specific relation between theory and practice, the domestic space, the collective space (peers), the market and the civil space¹. Upon moving my practice outside of the confinement of the conventional art institutions the logic of the “rest of the world” manifested itself. What are the rules and methods of organising public space and the landscape? I discovered that the models and organisation of processes work as defining principles, thus limiting the possible outcome. Desiring different outcomes entails addressing or even reforming these organisation methods and processes. This gives a completely different dimension to the role of the artist. Not showing on the stage but working on the creation of alternative models, the preconditions of the stage and the stage itself, in an attempt to create an space for different voices.

Today we see one economical model after the next failing, putting citizens and societies in real danger. The artist; the one who asks questions, voices what did not have a voice yet, renders visible and points at new ways and possibilities, can make an essential difference in the development of participatory solutions.

13:50 Discussion (chair Sophie with Maruska as co-chair) (40 min)

14:40 Break (10 min)

14:50 David Louwrier
 'What's that artist doing in my lab?
 Bioart as non-conformist science communication ' (10 min)

My project aims to create an open space for public discussion around the transition towards a biobased society. It will probably take several decades before we can shift away from fossil fuels, but the techniques to accomplish this are being developed at this moment. It is important to discuss these techniques now, since if we start this discussion after the development, there will not be any room to make changes. This is however not an easy task: how can you really discuss a technique that is not there yet?

I look at a way of working together with artists, who can experience the scientific developments directly in the laboratory. The idea is that they are then able to communicate their experiences and the possible ethical implications of the techniques to a broad range of stakeholders. This happens in non-conformist ways, completely different from the usual science communication. Being a trained life scientist, I help the artists with their lab work. At the same time I look at how these art and science collaborations take place, and how these could be assessed. During my talk I will discuss several events including a project at the Lowlands festival and an exhibition at the GEM in The Hague.

15:00 Italo Zuffi
 'Competitive factors and positions and in art' (10 min)

* I will give my definition of what to be an artist involves and brings about. The thoughts and words I will express should be understood as the product of an underway open self-interrogation, taken at this particular time of its development.

* I will briefly illustrate the motives that urged me to consider taking up the role of the researcher.

* Through a binary-definition, I will give my interpretation of what 'to research' means:

- 1) researching as an exercise of self-reflexion essentially focused on one's own preoccupations, practice and outcomes.
- 2) researching as the possibility of experimenting and/or to produce experience.

15:10 Discussion (chair Paula with Lonnie & Siebren as co-chair) (40 min)

16:00 Break (tea / coffee) (15 min)

16:15 Brief re-cap / response by Anke Bangma

16:30 General discussion chaired by Lucy Cotter (60 min)

17:30 Borrel / drinks

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Speakers

Maruška Svašek

Maruška Svašek is Reader in Social Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast. She studied painting and graphics at Art Academy Minerva in Groningen, and completed doctoral research in Anthropology in 1996 at the University of Amsterdam. Before coming to Queen's, she held a research fellowship at the University of Utrecht, exploring political, emotional and material aspects of Czech-German relations in the Bohemian-Bavarian borderland.

Svašek's main research interests include art, material mediation, migration and emotions. In her most recent work she seeks to bring these strands together, exploring mobility and agency of humans, objects and images in an era of intensifying globalization and transnational connectivity. From June 2010 to October 2012, Svašek led the HERA-funded Interdisciplinary Research Project Creativity and Innovation in a World of Movement (CIM), a collaboration between Queen's University Belfast; Manchester Metropolitan University; Open University; Amsterdam VU University; University of Utrecht; Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo; and Museum of Ethnology. In the context of CIM, she conducted fieldwork amongst Indians in Tamil Nadu and Northern Ireland, and established the Berghahn Book Series 'Material Mediations: People and Things in a World of Movement' (co-editor Birgit Meyer). Another major outcome of CIM is an Open University Resource that explores the social lives of specific artefacts (editor Amit Desai).

Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan

Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan work together since 2002, producing film installations and exhibition projects that explore the boundaries of the public realm. Their silent films peruse the tones, movements and textures of cultural and geopolitical landscapes like Europe's new borders (Grossraum, 2005), sites of global trade (Monument of Sugar, 2007), or the non-sites of cultural heritage (Monument to Another Man's Fatherland, 2008). These films are often countered by textual supplements, which disclose the contingency of their fieldwork and research. Performing a drifting studio practice, Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan are involved in all aspects of (re)production from the handling of the cinema-eye, to montage, writing, or the graphical design of artist publications.

Venues where their works have been shown include Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthaus Zurich; Argos, Brussels; SMBA and De Appel Amsterdam; CCA Vilnius; the Shanghai and Guangju Biennials. Included in public collections of Les Abattoirs, Toulouse; MUDAM Luxembourg; FRAC Marseille; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Julia Stoschek Collection, Dusseldorf; Hoffmann Sammlung, Berlin; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

Lucy Cotter

Lucy Cotter trained as an artist and exhibited internationally before turning to writing and curatorial practice. She holds an M.A. in History of Art from the University of Southampton and a PhD in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam. Her doctoral dissertation offered a cultural analysis of curating from the 1950s to the present, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological view of the art world, postcolonial theory and Gilles Deleuze's notion of minor art. A former co-director of Public Space With a Roof gallery, she has also worked at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, the Nuova Icona gallery and Ludwig's Forum for International Art. She was co-curator of Here as the Centre of the World, a two-year artistic research project that took place in six cities worldwide and is working on a number of new curatorial projects at present. Cotter is head of the Master Artistic Research at the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague and tutors at PhDarts, University of Leiden and at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam. She has been published widely as a writer and art critic. She has guest-edited Third Text (London) and The HTV (NL) and is currently guest-editor of a special edition of Diecisiete journal (Mexico City) focusing on artistic research, which is forthcoming in 2014.

Larissa Mendoza Straffon

Larissa Mendoza Straffon is PhD Researcher at Leiden University. From 2005 to 2007, she was Research Assistant in the archaeological projects "Means of Graphic Communication among the Post-Palaeolithic Societies of Catalonia", and "Biodiversity and Hunter-Gatherer Societies in Quaternary Mexico", directed by Dr Ramon Viñas of the Institut Catala de Paleoecologia Humana i Evolucio Social in Tarragona, Spain. She received her Master of Arts in Archaeology at University of Leiden in 2005.

Mendoza Straffon's PhD project will focus on relevant research on evolutionary disciplines, regarding the social and physical processes that intervene in art making and perception. The expected conclusion will optimistically consist of a logical and holistic explanation for the beginnings and development of human art practices and an integrating model for the interpretation of Pleistocene art.

Irene Fortuyn

Irene Fortuyn is head of the Man and Leisure department of the Design Academy Eindhoven and is a senior lecturer at the Royal Academy The Hague. She started her artistic practice with Robert O'Brien (Bromyard, UK, 1951 – Leiden, NL, 1988) as Fortuyn/O'Brien. The Fortuyn/O'Brien collaboration began with the publication of the manifesto "Bon Voyage Voyeur, thoughts about sculpture". Central to this text and the work they created was the issue of the position of the work of art and the possible perception of it. After a solo exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1991, and Documenta VIII in Kassel, the focus of the practice shifted more and more beyond the walls of the art institutions. Defining and designing spaces, both mentally and physically, became the focus of the work. This led to the PhD research project concerning the physical, social and mental space of the Dutch mainly man-made landscape

David Louwrier

David Louwrier completed his Master Life Science and Technology at the TU Delft (2010) and holds a Bachelor degree in the same field (2008). He is currently a PhD researcher at Leiden University.

The title of Louwrier's PhD project is 'Making a field of interpretation for BioSolar Cells'. It aims to create an open space for public discussion of the implications of the biobased economy. The project explores a new way of engaging the public in addressing the questions raised by BioSolar Cells that concern society at large, outside the realm of scientific research or industrial production, with artistic probes for debate. The search for this new communication form involves bioart, as a form of art in which both research on biosolar cells and public debate are visible. The art works and interactive artistic performances are presented and discussed in public events with the objective of shaping ethical guidelines.

Italo Zuffi

Italo Zuffi's research interests are competitive factors and competitive positions in art. He carries out an investigation, focused on the notion of competition within contemporary art practice. 'Competition', or the agonistic struggle performed in order to determine one's position within an existing cultural context, will be initially examined in relation to Helmuth Plessner's thought, according to which 'living things are bodies that bring about a border.

He is a visual artist who employs sculpture, performance, text-based work and video to create 'no total design, just an indefinite series of stanzas' (Pier Luigi Tazzi, 2003). He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna (Diploma in Painting, 1993), and at Central St Martin's College of Art & Design, London (Master of Arts, 1997). In 2001, he was awarded the Wheatley Bequest Fellowship at the Institute of Art & Design, Birmingham. Presently a PhD candidate at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, University of Leiden, he is focusing on the notions of Aesthetical Competition, Indivisibility, and the Hyperlyrical. He lives in Milan.

Anke Bangma

Since January 2011 Anke Bangma works a curator contemporary art at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. From 1998 to 2007 she was Course Director of the Fine Art program at the Piet Zwart Institute for postgraduate studies in Rotterdam. Between 2004 and 2010 she lectured at the Bergen National Academy of the Arts in Norway. She was a member of the curatorial team of the Witte de With center for contemporary art in Rotterdam (1993-1998).

A recent curatorial project was the exhibition 'Imagined Places' at the Tropen Museum, Amsterdam, 2013. Her projects include Who, What, When, Where, Why and How by Rod Dickinson and Steve Rushton on Hannah Arendt's reading of the Bard College library (Bard CCS, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 2009); the exhibition Performing Evidence (SMART Project Space, Amsterdam, 2009), and the publication Resonant Bodies, Memories, Voices and Experiment, Memory, Re-enactment (Piet Zwart Institute / Revolver, 2008 and 2005).