



pen

issues

number two



Here is the great secret:
The thought is made in the mouth.
I still consider myself very charming.
-Tristan Tzara

The Artists Interviewed In This Issue:

1. Harmen de Hoop
2. Maziar Afrassiabi
3. Jetske de Boer
4. Marc Bijl
5. Arend Roelink
6. Nicoline van Harskamp

Limited Edition:

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What you have in your hands is the second issue of what has turned out to be an annual publication of interviews with artists who are either living in or are moving through Rotterdam, the Netherlands. I began *Open Issues* in 2004 because I was interested in creating a platform for greater dialogue about themes/trends in visual art. I figured the best way to start a dialogue was to start asking questions, but to also record and collect the answers and place them in the public sphere. It is a local publication only to the extent that it is where I reside at the moment. It is also my aim to bridge the national/international gap as much as possible, therefore *Open Issues* as a project is currently looking to expand its horizons.

I embarked upon these interviews with an idea of three related themes, a digital audio recorder and faith that there *was* something to be said in, and something to be gained, from these interviews. *Open Issues* is straightforward in this sense and I aim to keep it focused on presenting the interviews as close to the original, one-hour recorded conversation. The artists are given the opportunity to review their transcribed text and edit out undesirable content. In order to establish context between the themes and the artist's artwork, each participant was invited to fill an A5 page with material related to their practice.

I have been fortunate to have found such artists (in both issues) that were willing to be free with their opinions and exercise patience with the process of making this zine. I have learned a great deal from each of the persons interviewed, and I would like to thank everyone for the unique combination of insight and anecdotes in each interview, past and present. Let's hope that the dialogue generated in these pages will continue for you in future, exciting ways.

S.R. Kucharski



Harmen de Hoop

An interview held on December 15th, 2004 in Harmen's living room over coffee and walnuts, with the recording beginning halfway through a sentence on reasons for artists to write about the arts and publish those same thoughts...

HH: ...in Holland there is a tradition to just do it, make the artwork, and that artists don't write or talk about their work.

SRK: Which is surprising because the Netherlands has 3 or 4—if you count Belgium publications written in Dutch—art papers or magazines that focus on art related ideas, theories and culture.

HH: They are made by the art historians and all the people around the art world: the organizers and curators. The artists can only be involved if they are interviewed.

SRK: Which is something I found a pity, when thinking of why artists weren't talking about their own work, talking about their own ideas and what they saw happening around them. This is something I have been interested in since I was living in the San Francisco Bay Area, where I found few artists writing about the art culture around them, and having that published in any form. There also were very few artists organizing their own shows. There was little dialogue beyond general socializing. There wasn't even a venue for it, to begin with. Then, when I came to Rotterdam, I saw that there were more opportunities to make your own books or exhibitions that reflected a subjective view, but few were doing it. No one seemed to have opinions about what was being shown, or if they did, the artists were not being very vocal about it.

HH: I always have had the attitude to comment on what I have seen. I do remember once going to a show by a good friend of mine and I gave him some critical comment on his opening night and he made fun of me by saying "oh, this is somebody who is actually talking about the content!" So, it is totally not done, especially at the opening night!

SRK: I think it is difficult to be critical at an opening night because there is an idea behind an opening that it is a celebration and you don't want to ruin anything by being critical.

HH: Yes, but this is the wrong attitude. For me, judging each other's work—not to condemn it of course—to have a dialogue about it, how the work is received—this is what I like about critical comments, especially on my own work. People get to say "this and this doesn't work," or whatever. I would rather hear that than "it's beautiful." That comment doesn't mean anything. The attitude I think is that there is a dialogue through seeing someone else's work and thinking about it for your self. Just showing the work is also a form of dialogue. Not in words, of course, but visual. This is more the tradition in Holland, I think. For me, I want the dialogue between all the works, all the works you might see in the exhibition. For me, I never needed or wanted any written information about the work. In general, if I see written information in catalogues

or books, it seems to be written for the layman, for people outside the art world and not trained to use his/her eyes. Because I know the history of art so well, I can judge new works, without words.

SRK: So your art practice also incorporates knowledge of art history and having that as a background...

HH: It is to feel you are having a dialogue with history, that it is your partner. And, not repeating it. I hate art about art and I hate people who naively make a painting like Anselm Kiefer because they like Anselm Kiefer. Fuck it! No, the thing is you want to stand on the shoulders of those giants and go further! That is the whole feeling; that is the whole dialogue I feel with history.

SRK: I agree and one of the themes I wanted to discuss is the desire for longevity, and within your own work. Do you think your work falls into a type of history, within art, and do you think your work is more tied into the past or the future?

HH: First, when I started, it was very clear to me I didn't want to make an art that has a philosophy built into it that transcends death, as in Rembrandt: he still lives on because you can still see a Rembrandt painting. Somehow, a lot of artists had that motive, that sort of cheating death. I had no problem with death what-so-ever when I was young, so I wanted to be pragmatic—this is the here-and-now and people are just tiny specs, ants, unimportant...let's not be arrogant, there are five billion others just like us in the world! I wanted that attitude to be in my work, so the choice was to be temporary in my work and that I had no influence on whether it stayed there for one hour, three weeks or ten years. That was going to be out of my control. They were all very deliberate, philosophical positions, in some way—to illustrate my opinions, when trying to define what my work was about when I was young—and I didn't change in that respect, it is still my attitude, it is the position I choose, because it suited me and I wanted to do that in opposition to other artists who...when I started, it was the middle of the eighties, there was really a culture of the big superstars, like Julian Schnabel, and the whole myth around artists like that...I wanted to be the opposite, I wanted to be anonymous, just part of society, an everyday man.

Your second question, about art history and the past/future...I reacted to everything that was done before me, so I was certainly influenced by the experiments in art at the end of the sixties and throughout the seventies, where people were questioning what a gallery in a white space was. I had a knowledge of what they did—doing something in a gallery, in a white space will always be a bit boring for me because, even if you place a red dot in the middle of the space, giving the space a type of energy...but it has all been done before. It uses some type of theater, and isn't very interesting anymore. When I started, I was aiming at the future, trying to establish different rules, for myself and giving that back to the art world. It was an attitude, or a working habit.

SRK: So you felt conscious of knowing what happened before but making sure your work stood apart from it, that it wouldn't be simply associated with the type of working methods used by artists in the sixties and seventies.

HH: Definitely. For me, art was never just a form of self-expression, a masturbation, never. There always slips in something personal and there is no problem with that, but it shouldn't be the center of focus. I am not on that side of the art spectrum. So, knowing your history, and going beyond that, is the adventure. It is an adventure and I still have the feeling of an unknown territory ahead of me and that makes it different than what everybody else does, of course!

SRK: Do you feel like your work, as a whole—if you could say that of your work from the last ten years—if you were to look back on it, would show some reflection of self? Like a similar attitude, or, that the works are so different that there is no general message?

HH: I think it is very coherent. It is more or less ones own limitation that gives work a character, which is then both a positive and negative thing. It is recognizable as my work, because there are certain issues and things that I think about. But is also that I can't make art work about other things; I would like to make work about some things...I can really be jealous of artists of artists who can make work with a broader vision, a bigger image of a more total world that allows them to comment on anything. If I try to do that, especially commenting on very political or big, contemporary questions, the terrible issues of today...my work is going to be horrible! I feel the urge to do it, but it doesn't work—I have to make very small and very direct actions. So, there are social, political and even philosophical ideas behind the work, but I can't make it very obvious. That is the way that I, in the end, can be satisfied. My work often focuses upon one part of society, and is sometimes limited by that way it exists, which is often outside, in the public space and as non-art, in the everyday and to not be seen as Art.

SRK: Maybe you could also say that if you are developing a work and you focus it on something, maybe indirect, that it leaves open all the other things one could be addressing, therefore calling attention to the “bigger picture.” An example for me is your piece *Grow Your Own Vegetables*, which was a hand-painted sign placed in an open, sandy section of a larger stone tile plaza in North Rotterdam. Because the work focuses the attention on the impossibility of growing vegetables in that one by one meter plot of land, you become aware of the bigger picture of the massive concrete jungle that exists around us in the city.

HH: Yes, but that has to be in every work. There has to be all these things that are indirect or opposite and are addressed. But I still have the feeling—I make these works about the use of public space and our connection with food, that we lost it when the concept of the supermarket arrived—all these kind of opinions are hidden, but you can feel it. I am sure that the passersby who see the work feel that. That is what and how I judge if it is good work or not. But even then, it doesn't say anything about radical Islam, or other big issues of today. I always have the feeling that there are other topics I could address, and I have a feeling that I can...this is led me to finally make my first good work about sexuality! I always wanted to do that! I tried it years ago by hanging women's underwear in a parking space near a highway, on a washing line. And it looked good, this ambivalence of clean underwear in this odd spot next to the highway, as if you were a camper stopping at the side of the highway. But then, one could think of the whole sexual-rape

idea that could also happen on this spot. However, I wasn't really satisfied, and now I have made this work in the Kralingse Bos, which I am satisfied with and addresses the issue of sexuality, because, my god, it is part of life! And I was never able to make a work about it! This is what I mean about feeling my own limitations sometimes.

I don't like obvious, political art that preaches to your own crowd. There are a lot of art created in this way and the artists behind the work are being naïve. I don't think art should be just illustrating: deciding to make something about youth culture, illustrating some aspect of youth culture and then thinking it actually says something about youth culture. No way. It just appeals to the crowd who identifies with the culture, but it doesn't actually say anything about it. That isn't enough for me and that is the same for me with political art that has an agenda. Just showing it, in my opinion, is naïve. Because I go out, I watch television, the news...I am not naïve and that these artists have to show me that there is racism in the art world, or something else. No, they need to reflect on racism, if that is their topic.

SRK: Do you think in that way, works like that, political works like your describe, won't stand the test of time, that they are too flat and without a contemporary perspective, they don't say anything to a long standing train of thought...

HH: Exactly, I am sure works like that will not stand the test of time. But then again, 99 percent of the art that is made won't stand the test of time! So maybe you shouldn't be annoyed by this kind of art and just ignore it somehow.

SRK: I think that the idea that a work will stand the test of time cannot be judged, at this moment.

HH: No, but you can recognize work that is really strong, like when Bruce Nauman made his video works at the beginning of the nineties, they were so strong especially in comparison to the other video works being made at the time, that one could imagine them standing the test of time. Ok, we will see how future generations come to think about these video works, but you can, at this moment, see the difference between really good works and works that are not that good.

SRK: For me, when work can effect people of different cultures, sub-cultures, at the same time, for me that is a sign that the work will be able to last. That the work is more universal, and that when you find artwork that people from around the world can relate too...

HH: Somehow, that may be true, but there is a risk involved because it is the same with kitsch; kitsch works because it can be recognized by a lot of people. In the way you defined it, that a work is identifiable by untrained people from a different group, there was this risk. I think, ok, lets take the most radical minimal art. It was made for a very select group who, at that time, could truly understand it. So, it was only for your own circle and none outside it. For me, that is no problem, because I think art is an elitist field. There are so many fields outside art that have their own public. So,

I don't have a problem with elitist art, and the effect is, that people outside the original elitist circle eventually read about it many years later and the influence goes on. I also like misunderstanding things, so if what someone does with a misunderstanding of minimal art twenty years later and makes something new with it, that is ok with me. So the definition you used earlier for long lasting art would not be what I look for.

SRK: There is another side to this, that if there is something that can be accessible to different cultures, even if it is removed from its original intentions or ideals once, twice or three times, it is the fact that it still *influences* the other, that it in a sense transcends its original elitist origins. This is something you might not be able to say is true to say early American genre painting, where artists were painting wheat field landscapes and barns in Ohio. That might be something that won't transcend cultures.

HH: Well, I like the fact that that you cannot control what effect art has—there are always power structures behind these things, how the information gets around, for example. But I like the fact that examples such as this, American genre painting, could effect a Frenchman who, by the fact that it is unimportant, will do something with it unexpected, because his attitude is totally open. At least that is one of the possibilities! I like how forgotten things can be enjoyed because they are left alone and stand without judgment.

SRK: This is interesting, because I would like to talk about another theme: mobile, transnational, interstellar. It is an idea of art being readable, by other cultures, by other people than from where you come from. I think this is a topic you can address, because in your own artwork, you aim to travel to different places and make artwork in new cities. How does this traveling affect your artwork and how do you find yourself relating to the places you go? Like, for example, when you traveled to Hamburg, Germany and soon will be traveling to South America.

HH: My experience was that between five and ten years ago, I thought my work was about the behavior of human beings, so it was universal. That was my thought. But then, I went to India, for the first time, to make a work, and I came to find that it didn't "work" there. I found that I was commenting on a certain use of public space, with rules. And, those rules simply didn't apply in India; it was much more chaotic and a whole lot of things were happening at the same time. It was not this...Western, more restricted, encoded, environment. So I didn't make any good works there.

SRK: And still you attempted to make works there...

HH: I did attempt to make something, but it was from my own background, my own working method, I just did the same thing in India as I do here. I adjusted a bit, but I came to think that it couldn't work there. I had to then think why that was. So, it makes me aware that I was actually making artworks that were connected to western society, the cities and urban spaces in western cities.

Now it has changed. One thing is I have now started to work with people, to ask people to do something, like actions, events, whatever. And, that implies, or

somehow I grew out of this narrow field of commenting on certain aspects of Western public space, because now I have the feeling I can go somewhere, stay there a while, to feel more of the culture, and play within those specific set of rules. And working with people somehow makes it easier. But maybe I can also make these public objects still; I don't know yet. It changed from the fact, and this surprised me, that my previous work wasn't universal, or as universal as I hoped. On the other hand, I think that every society is made of a lot of different groups—even the Dutch society, with so many different visions, important ideas—so even then, if I make a work outside here in the Netherlands, everybody will not necessarily understand it because they are all Dutch. It is always ok if people do not recognize what I do as artwork, or notice it specifically as artwork. That is part of what I do, actually. But that is the same with painting: if a modernist painting hangs in a modernist art space, the public is selective, because a certain public is only visiting that space. Which means you can expect them to have some knowledge of the language that is used, therefore have an opinion of the work.

SRK: Well, you can expect that from them, but it doesn't always come true!

HH: Yes. That is why I said you can only expect it, and I am surprised that taste, only the feelings of the public, are important to the public. Part of the public only goes to places to see artwork to only confirm what they think and feel themselves, not to or try to get into the mind of someone else, the feelings of someone else, to reflect within a dialogue between viewer and artwork. Like, they like the color red, it stands for warmth, so they like all red paintings.

SRK: What makes you keep up this activity of traveling to new locales and developing new work in the context of the place you visit? Especially if you think that in the Dutch culture, there are enough sub-cultures to address and receive varied responses to your ideas.

HH: For me, I get really inspired by new places and new information. I like it if these places don't confirm what I already know, my own culture. I want to learn from that; it is a personal thing. But, you can also comment on anything, the whole human existence, better by seeing your own culture through experiencing other cultures. It makes me aware of what my own culture is, besides that I want to reflect on the whole human situation.

SRK: Do you specifically bring back your experiences to Holland, to Rotterdam, and use them to develop works that bridge the two places, bring them closer in any specific way?

HH: It is a lot of things at the same time. First, it is a learning process for me as a person, which also means that, later on, it will get into new work at a later date, because you continue to develop as a person as you do as an artist. Second, it is being aware of the difference between cultures; as I work in Asia I begin to see my own culture differently. There isn't a direct wish in there; it is instead, in general, about being a human being and wanting to reflect on the world.

SRK: How many times have you gone away and spent time working in foreign places?

HH: I try to go at least once a year, for a working period of a few months. I am also trying to accelerate it a bit, so I try for twice a year, for a long working period. And this includes going to Belgium, France and Germany. I am away a lot.

SRK: Do you consider yourself a Dutch artist?

HH: I never considered myself a Dutch Citizen in the sense of nationalism, that there are borders, this small piece of Earth, and within is the Netherlands and outside it German and Belgium. It never meant anything to me. But, at the same time, in a cultural sense, I am aware that I am totally a Calvinist Dutch person. I am made by that culture, and I don't fight it. It would be an illusion to say I am anything else. I see other people in other cultures, such as Spain or Italy, that they have a different upbringing, so they have a different upbringing on all parts of life. What I want to say is, in a cultural sense, I am totally Dutch. My work, I think it is hard for me to judge because I am the insider, I wouldn't be surprised if you could clearly see it—everybody, even Dutch people, but especially people who are not Dutch—I think they will say this is typical Dutch art. And well, it isn't that strict, they could think that I am German or at least Northern European.

SRK: Meaning that there is a type of regionalism to your work, they way it is developed with a Northern European style?

HH: Yes, and I think that is a good thing, because the only other thing I can think of, is people trying to be “international” and copying some idea of being international. Like what happened after the Second World War up to the eighties, when America was dominating the art world, and all over the World artists made copies of this American art. And this is never good. I mean, the Americans were the only ones who could make American art. Copying should never be a goal, and one should be careful of it. I think it is good to acknowledge the context in which you are brought up in, the influence of who you are and not fight it.

SRK: I think that is an interesting comment you made, about between WWII and the eighties, that the rest of the World was looking at American art and copying it, and didn't look towards their own culture. I see a trend in the Arts of a growing “International Artist,” someone who works without borders, no nation and no boundaries. They could be born in Thailand, grown up in Berlin, now making work in New York and exhibiting around the World, becoming eventually from no place yet every place at the same time. I wonder how that affects an artist, by being so mobile, so trans-national. This is why I brought up the idea of being interstellar, of exploding off the planet and going every direction, every place possible.

HH: I think if that was your life, that you weren't fixed to one country the first twenty-five years of your life—your parents moved around and took you all over the globe—than that is the situation you have to work from. And, you can judge the artist's

artwork on that, whether it appears fake or not. I think it is wrong, if someone stays in a little village in Germany all his life, trying to make his art about the Internet and airports, then it is fake. But if your life is lived being on airports all the time, then the work can have a feeling to it and an attitude.

SRK: So it is important to you that even if artists are moving around a lot, or being invited to foreign museums or locales—or even if you were invited to a museum, lets say—one should try to keep their work close to what they are familiar with?

HH: Well, it is different for every person, and you have to define it for yourself. It is more about honesty and integrity: those are the issues to think about. I have been brought up in Holland and traveling started relatively late. Now, I travel a lot, but I do it on my own terms. So I am not this artist who is invited to do shows all over the globe. That is not part of my life and it is not part of my work; that content is not in my work. Somehow, I think, there is the content in my work where there is this person who is fascinated by the whole world and he goes out in it and stays for a long time, not just in an art context but also to experience daily life. My work isn't about traveling, it is about the places I stay. And I would be dishonest if I made work about other things.

SRK: If you were invited to go somewhere, by a museum lets say, to make artwork responding to the surrounding area, the people, culture etc., do you think you could have the reaction that you couldn't make work that fits that particular place?

HH: Yes, certainly. And, if I could make something, it could be different from previous work. When I have been asked to do commissions, that means for me the work will be different from self-initiated work. It is all about context, to work with the reality of a context.

SRK: Earlier in this interview you said, like going to India, that you made works that weren't very good works, in the end. It implies, in a certain way, that you don't use those works anymore, for example, in your portfolio. So, you position yourself in a way that you self-initiate works, and you take yourself places, and you make your work without it being expected or even known. Therefore, there is always the possibility that the work turns into something you don't want to show and you stop the process.

HH: The whole work? Well, it always starts with selecting an idea that you think is good. That is the first, but every artist has that selection criteria. The second thing, there is always the possibility that as I am traveling I come to the realization that I don't have anything to say anymore. I had this crisis once or twice, and when it happens, I simple stop. I hate it when artists continue to make artwork because it is their financial support and with no motive to make good art, to really push yourself to make a new dialogue with the art world and art history. In my case, I would just stop. I do think that I make artwork in order to reflect upon being human, philosophically. I can imagine, for myself that it will continue to go on until my death. And, I am sure it is the same for everyone, whether you're an artist or a scientist. It is something you do for yourself. The second step in the process is bringing it outside of the personal and placing it in the world,

the art context or give it some kind of use. That is always my criteria, first, that I am in dialogue with the World and art history, and I position myself in that. But it is not related to being a part of the art world, to have a career or to be famous or get rich.

SRK: When making your work in the public space, because you are not invited, no deadline or way you have to make it, what then is your opinion of artists who get invited to a museum and have to make something for this and that exhibition by a certain date? Which is a pressure put on their personal working methods and because they have been invited and paid to make something...

HH: There is a lot of problems in that field of art making. If you are a painter, you just have these paintings and you can make a show with them, because they are already there. If you make installations, or go into working in the public space, then it is a whole different story. People who do installations, who remake an old one, then there is less of a problem. If you make a new one, it can be a nice adventure for the artist and for the public, but a lot of time it can go wrong. Because it is in a fixed time, it cannot be judged before it is finished and a deadline can be a burden to working methods. In public space, it is a different story altogether. I hardly see anything interesting made for the public space, as I don't believe in commissioned public work. I didn't label myself an artist working in public space; I consider myself more as a painter would, someone who wanted to make my own works and happened to need the city for that, which is loosely defined as public space. Some of those artists, who from their own initiative choose to work in the public space, like Keith Haring, only a few of them, I think were quite good. For me there needs to be this own initiative, otherwise the work is worthless. Because the chance that it could be a good work through commission, I consider it a very low chance. Although the whole motive can be different, depending. If you are an artist who is just concerned with beautifying a plaza in an architectural sense, then it is just a certain position one takes.

SRK: Maybe then people should call your work "open air actions" or something other than public art?

HH: I don't care about the labels anymore; I try to avoid every label. But, most of the artists I like, said the same thing when they were young: it is not art, not artwork, just work. So you try to avoid every label, but then you find out it is just another cliché, that other self-critical artists had problems with labels, so now I just don't care. It just isn't an issue I want to waste my energy on, no way.

SRK: Even though your work is found outside in the public space, how do you feel about it being for free, essentially a public property? Because after you have made it and leave it out in the open space, it starts to belong to everyone who witnesses it...

HH: Well, that is not a problem, if you do not see artworks as a capitalist good that you have to make a living from. There are so many artists, that even if they make objects, they don't sell them. So, hey, they still are not part of the market! For me, art is always a reflection, so it isn't related to the money; you have to find your own way of financing it. And that isn't such a strange thing. It was inspired by experiments

in the late 60's where artists tried to get out of this art market. I like this idealism. I am also part of a Dutch system where there is not an art market, different from Germany and Belgium where at least there is a bit of an art market. And we Dutch have this system of grants. So the first time I was in American and I showed documentation of my works to American artists, they couldn't understand it because you couldn't sell it! So this whole "free" thing, they had a very strange reaction to it, up until the point I told them they should see the work as a European subsidy/grant art. And then it was Ok, if you label it like that! I think this reality of subsidy/grant art only makes the art world more diverse! It is not that I am living off of subsidy, either. I simply don't relate to money or the market, to my work. As being for free, it is part of, first, wanting to make a certain work and then taking all the consequences of that choice, that action. So it is out there, out of my control, I don't know how long it will last in the space or how many people will react to it. So because it isn't made for money, it is by default for free.

SRK: I have a strange quote from Pablo Picasso that I would like to read to you and maybe you can give a reaction on it: "The point is, art is something subversive. It's something that should not be free. Art and liberty, like the fire of Prometheus, are things one must steal, to be used against the established order. Once art becomes official and open to everyone, then it becomes the new academicism."

HH: "art is something subversive," I agree with that, at least when it is new and not part of a general consciousness, later on. I mean, Duchamp is not subversive anymore, but in his time very much so...in general, I think all good art has a certain subversive aspect, even if just trying to be beautiful in an art world that views beauty as suspicious. But, he goes on to say that it is something that should not be free. There really isn't something to argue about that. Art and liberty, that "they are things one must steal," I start to think: what does he mean, every member of the public should steal art?

SRK: No, I think he is saying that artists should steal the fire, the idea, the energy...

HH: The whole stealing thing, well, I don't think that relates to my ideas and artwork. It is an argument within a certain art context, that artists can steal ideas from other artists, sell it maybe...that doesn't relate to my way of working. This whole free, non-free, stealing or property thing in Picasso's argument... "to be used against the established order," well, artists who work to please the established order don't make the best work because they are not adventurous enough, they simply want to confirm. But, it doesn't mean that all the artists who try to do something against the established order are good either. This statement by him doesn't say anything about the product, or the free or not free issue. Someone could work either for or against the established order but still have no problem selling their work to rich banks for good money. When I started, I was not interested in pleasing any kind of upper-class—it didn't relate to me. "When art becomes official and open to everyone..." what does he mean with that? Open to everyone?

SRK: I think he is saying that when art stops becoming mis-understood, that everyone is educated about it, it becomes accepted, it loses its impact.

HH: Well yes, then it does become the new academicism, but you cannot control it! And, you cannot stop it! When you have that knowledge, the processes that consumed prior artists work, you know, like for example Dada, which was against almost every bourgeois rule, now it is accepted as a recognized as an official type of art—the new academism. Yeah, it is always going to be like that. It is unavoidable. And it has nothing to do with being free or not free, I want to stress!

SRK: The one thing that I am curious to, which is why I presented this quote, is that in regards to your own art work, you do things out in the public space that aren't meant to be seen as "artwork," it is just placed. Because it isn't given any attention as Art, like objects placed in a gallery or museum, is it therefore more open to being misunderstood?

HH: I like to think about it as trying to create an authentic moment. I always separate the works, as they are outside, from my oeuvre, my documentation that I present to the art world. For me, it is very clear that those art works are temporary and unofficial, and they are often gone before they could even become the new academism! But, my ideas, my oeuvre, can, because it is based on documentation, a web site, catalogue and in that way is solely part of the art world. Ok, and maybe twenty years down the line someone will be able to look at my documentation and say, "yes, that is a typical Harmen de Hoop." Whether they will ever recognize it on the street is another thing! It is very separate, unless they were totally informed about my work, like you, when you saw the Grow Your Own Vegetables, even though you didn't know it was from me.

SRK: No, I didn't know it was one of your works, but I read it in an art context—someone was pointing this out to me and it wasn't some seven year old kid making a joke. It was obvious to me that someone had placed this hand-painted sign reading Grow Your Own Vegetables in a small sandy pit, for, as you said, "an authentic moment." I, of course, brought my own ideas about art, my knowledge of art and public art, social issues, etc to the piece. And, I knew what I was seeing was related to all those things...

HH: That it was probably an artwork.

SRK: Yes, I read it in a total art context.

HH: Yeah, you can't avoid it. I cannot avoid my own limitations, in that sense, that my own thoughts come from this art context, so...what I like about this piece in particular is other people can judge it differently. Not necessarily see it as an artwork. So this misunderstanding is good; I am not in control of these things.

SRK: I really like that statement you made: "looking for an authentic moment." It really does seem like an attitude towards artmaking in which something can't be owned or forced, it just has to happen...

HH: Yep. I was lacking it in the art world, especially with sculpture placed in the city, where one had a map and could go around having art pointed out to you. That experience is totally non-authentic, that is why I did not make work like that, in

that context. My work is just for the passerby, and the reason is because this is the only way to have an authentic moment.

SRK: Well, it is also a very personal moment.

HH: Yeah, it is very one-to-one, and anonymous. People don't know or need to know anything about me. The work is looking for an unpretentious, personal dialogue.

SRK: I think the work is also making a point that you see many things around you in your daily life that could be read in an artistic context, a social context, depending on what a person is most interested in. That is one thing I see in the work you have made, that it made me realize that things that are not artworks, that are not intentionally developed to be read in an artistic context, can be misunderstood and then read in an artistic context.

HH: Behind anything is an intention. Anything that exists in the public outside of nature, there has to be some kind of intention. But, there are of course all kinds of levels. What I do react against somehow, what I position myself against, is a lot of what you see in the public space has a certain kind of power structure behind it, the banks, the city council. There are all kinds of powers working behind the scenes and the individual has nothing to say. So, in everything I see, I feel there is a certain power structure, a certain group and a certain motive. And, for me, in a city, it is an accumulation of these groups who want something, to do something and from that urge comes culture, of course. And with culture I mean everything, not just art. So, I react against that by taking, although it is anonymous, a subjective position. And although it might be an absurd action, you can tell, you can see that there isn't a whole group behind it...I am being a bit careful about what I say now, because there are also works that I have done where it might seem that maybe the city council has done it, but I think you will always see that it was done by an individual, like...graffiti, that the work is always done by an individual and they are shouting!

SRK: OK, in that regard, where you are blurring a line between an action by an individual person and an action that might have been done by a group with an agenda, have you ever been stopped from making the work? Has anyone ever reacted to you, as if you were defacing something?

HH: Oh yes! Of course, both by the general public—who stopped to ask me what I was doing—and the police, a representation of the power structures that be. In general, it didn't get me into trouble. With the police, if they stopped me, I really had to stop. I had to give my name and they said they would send me a ticket...

SRK: Did you ever try to explain yourself, your actions and the context in which you were doing the work to the police?

HH: No, no, no way! Because, I work with the fact that I believe that every group, every person has different motives, and I know that the policemen cannot share my motive—they are coming from a different perspective. And, I try to understand

their position, and know they won't understand me. I do not expect respect in that sense for art, because I think art has a very bad reputation, in part because it is an elitist language—not because it is for the upper class but because it is for a small group of the general population. In general, I think, humans tend to dislike or not want to be burdened by the actions of smaller groups, which is where I think all the racism comes from.

SRK: I wouldn't necessarily say that the work you are developing, at least the work I have seen in person and in documentation, is you making a statement against any one thing. You are making work about certain things you are personally interested in. And maybe that is why they affect people on such a personal level.

HH: But what I do is still a critical reflection. If you are just improving the situation or making a place more beautiful or adding functions to the space that make it more useful, chances are the public will have a more immediate response to the work. That isn't what I want to do. So even if I am suggesting that I am improving something with my action, it should still remain off-center, remain un-useful and that is the comment I am trying to retain. Therefore I never expect a straightforward, positive reaction. The work is not meant for that; it is more meant that people are slightly disturbed at the moment of thinking. That would be enough for me. But, it still will not mean they will have a positive reaction to the work. However, what I am doing is not a particular subjective fight against society, and I don't think anyone would see it as that.

SRK: So, it is better described as a disturbance of space or disturbance of a place that makes people realize something is off...

HH: And, most people don't have an interest in any particular public space, as in financially or whatever, so they are free to have an open reaction to the work. I'm sure the ones who are responsible for the space will have another type of reaction: they will simply want to get rid of whatever I have done and return the space to its original way. I can imagine that what I do would seem like an annoyance to these people.

SRK: I think it is important to look at that idea of wanting, or feeling obligated, to return a space to its normal way of being.

HH: Well, it can be seen as cleaning up. A return to the normal bourgeois order. And my work is about that, changing the normal order a little bit.

SRK: So people should always be prepared to possibly witness something...odd, in the public space?

HH: Yes, everything you see on the street that is odd or could be art, *or not art*, but definitely not in-tune with the normal needs of the people, then that is my work...

Sunday night, in the living room

I am sitting in my living room, scanning an empty olive oil bottle with a household Epson scanner which I hold vertically. Curious to see if it is possible to capture images from a distance with a scanner. I have switched off the lights in the room and the only source of light is the scanner's lamp. It is late. The streets are empty and the silence is deafening, so much so that when the scanner started to work, almost immediately my whole body was soaked in sweat from the unexpected loudness of the sound. No particular results tonight, just a dark galaxy with dust on the surface and a ray of reflected light from the bottle's surface appears on my computer screen, when I switch on the monitor. It looks like a ghost picture.

This piece was driven by the assumption that two or more existing realities which may be located or happening in different geographical locations, are corresponding simulations in time.

Monday morning, in the living room

Today I tried to scan again only this time a panorama of the room itself in daylight. The result is beautiful. A variation of purple horizontal lines appears in Photoshop. It looks like a promising satellite picture from Saturn. This image gives me hope. It must be possible to capture more unexpected images. I have to experiment more. It is just the beginning.

Neither of these realities is the other's copy, rather, one is the other's shadow, while possibly the shadow was there first. One always being the reduced version of the other, while never being after or before the other. But as we understand a reflection or a shadow being always an effect of the original being, here there is no such hierarchy.

Tuesday morning, in the living room

It is a bright day. Some trees have already blossomed. The sun is present but not dominating the square in front of my house. The shadows of the trees are long and soft, pointing vaguely to the east. I scanned again, choosing the busiest corner of the living room, furniture, a pile of books and records. This time I move the scanner slowly from left to right. I am astonished by the results. The images are photographic and the objects are recognizable. Some segments of the image are slightly stretched while others are mashed. The consistency of the movement of my hands has a decisive influence on the way the room is being represented. The slower I move the more stretched the captured segment becomes. I don't remember moving so fast while passing my bookshelf. It looks so heavily mashed. Was I so inconsistent?

There are similarities to Gestalt therapy, having been through a session myself in my teens. In this therapy two chairs are placed opposite one another.

Wednesday afternoon, in the kitchen drinking coffee.

Today I went to the nearest estate agent in my neighborhood De Nieuwe Unie. I asked the guy behind the desk if it was possible to borrow a key to an empty house. To speed up the process I told him that I wanted to take photographs inside the house for artistic purposes and skipped an explanation of my true intentions. Without hesitation he pulled out a key from his drawer. "Here you are", he said. "A family was evicted from this house"- pointing at the keys- "last week, because they stopped paying their rent. Now the house is empty, although they have left a blue water bed behind, I hope you don't mind? If you want you can take it." I can keep the keys for four days.

The patient sits on one chair. He has to imagine himself sitting in the opposite chair. Asking questions of the other self and then changing places and trying to answer. It is a setup, a construction which helps one to be the other to oneself, while neither personalities is the initiator of his own identity.

Friday evening, in the bedroom

Today after two days of preparation I finally got to the house which is located in Beverwaard, a suburb of Rotterdam, a sleepy dead end. I took with me an Epson scanner, a notebook, one microphone, a microphone stand and a small mixer to plug the microphone in. It looked like a live electronic music setup without an audience. To my disappointment there was no water bed in the house. I wondered why the De Nieuwe Unie mentioned the water bed. Could it be that they took it before I entered the house? Or did the evicted family have a spare key. I started scanning the house room by room from different angles. I wanted to have uncompromising evidence from this abandoned and seemingly uninhabitable site. While scanning I recorded the sound of the scanner which was echoing in each room. It was getting dark outside and there were no lamps in the house to switch on. I collected my tools and started walking to the tram station. Back home before entering, I checked the letter box and found a letter from De Nieuwe Unie. The letter said that I was 3 months behind with the rent.

Maziar Afrassiabi

Interview held on December 17th, 2004 in the living room of Maziar's home over nuts, chocolate, tea and coffee. The recorded interview begins a few minutes after Maziar and I started to discuss the reasons for developing a format such as Open Issues...

Maziar Afrassiabi: How you collect these interviews, it is also good for yourself; it is like an encyclopedia that you can always go back to, to re-read who is doing what in Rotterdam at this time...

SRK: I gained two important things from doing these interviews: one, is collecting quotes and ideas, which come out of people spontaneously—they are talking and all of a sudden they say something really spontaneous and interesting and we have to stop and start talking about that because it is too important to ignore. Second, I get to learn something about people and their artwork, whom otherwise I wouldn't have the opportunity to learn something about them, *from* them. For these interviews, I try to familiarize myself with their work if I haven't already had the opportunity to see what they make. In your case, I re-read the *Review*: text based work that was published in the TENT agenda last year, and, I also looked you up online to see if I could find other statements about your artwork.

MA: Well, there is not much online of the older projects, because after I graduated from Utrecht—it was at this point I was exhibiting in Utrecht and Breda—my studio burned down and I lost all my documentation, everything. At the same time I started with playing music. So, from there I moved to Rotterdam and towards the direction of music. Now, I am slowly coming back to art. But, I didn't want to deal with institutions, because it felt unnatural. I decided to create my own platform. The first idea was to make art that instructs the viewer how to perceive it. This was a first step in order to avoid having my work being contextualized by institutions, to become more independent, even from the so-called independent institutions. After that, I became interested in making multiples. A recent example of this is an audio/visual piece where I scanned an empty house in the suburbs of South Rotterdam with a normal scanner, and while scanning I recorded the sounds of the scanner, the acoustics of the space and made a composition of it on CD. Together, the images and the composition form this piece, this product.

SRK: You started these multiples when you, as you say, returned to art?

MA: Yes, but I really wouldn't call them multiples, I would rather call them products, actually. I don't like the word multiple because it has this connotation of being temporary, or being a small version of the real thing, a condensed form.

The piece you mentioned, *Review*:, was the first test of this way of working, which is why I made it in a kind of hidden way. I wanted it to be read by the public and be distributed, but not really directed, only put in-between the pages of TENT's agenda mailing and then see what happens, what is the reaction. Also, I tried to take different roles of artists in the work, not really emphasizing the fact that it is fiction, or pretending that the work that was reviewed was mine, so that the reader could go a step further and

think about the relativity of the piece and how anyone can take different roles, and what are those choices based on. For me, actually, the choice is less important than the ability to take on different roles, lets say. Choice is more related to taste, which is something I am not interested in.

SRK: In the *Review*: piece, the first of three issues which came out in TENT's agenda, when I read it for the first time, I initially just wondered why it was there, in the agenda, to begin with. There were a lot of questions of why it existed. Then I thought that someone managed to slip in it the agenda, maybe without permission, or maybe through some odd reason, like for example, it didn't get printed on time or someone working for TENT was slipping them in as an action art piece. I took the content for face value, that this was work you had done, part of a sub-exhibition for TENT. When the second issue of *Review*: came out, I realized that *Review*: itself was a project, but I didn't know exactly why the project existed in this particular form, as a text-based work. I kept asking myself why you just didn't get a show in TENT, why it was only a review without being in TENT at the same time. *Review*: became a review of something we weren't going to get to see, which also implied, somehow, that we should already be familiar with the piece. I thought that was an interesting position to place the reader in. When the third issue was delivered, I realized straight away that the work that was being described was faked. I realized that the work didn't exist in the first place and that the action, the actual art work, was the project *Review*:. I understood that you had to take the work in context. I then started to question the reviewers themselves, as there were three different ones and whether they themselves even existed. I found the whole affair very interesting and it was also my first introduction to what you produce as an artist.

MA: It is interesting for me to recall the whole project through someone else explaining it. I didn't have any feedback from TENT, which was the strange thing about the project. I asked to make the work and they said OK, and after that nothing. You know, they even paid for the printing costs and then nothing! No comments...

The idea that the work doesn't exist, I was inspired by how when you read art magazines, most of the time the "best works" come to you in reviews. I thought then, that the review itself becomes the work, at that moment, because most of the time you wont see the original piece anyway. My idea was to stick with the review and forget the actual work.

SRK: Yes, in many ways when you read art magazines you are experiencing the work through the writer, and you really can be quite manipulated...Can you talk more about how the idea manifested and why you choose to give it away for free via TENT?

MA: I think this is a difficult question, because by the time I actually made the work, I probably had different reasons for how to make a project like this. I think the obvious reason was I was searching for a re-introduction into the arts. But, I wanted to keep it very open—working in a series, in different roles by being different reviewers of my own work, without ever realizing the art piece itself, keeping the work on the level of a proposition, only. In the end, I just enjoyed writing, writing about artists attitudes I don't like, to be quite direct here and there within the writing. I got some reactions from

friends who thought I was talking about them! The second *Review*: was about maquettes and builders and there are lots of people who felt quite connected to what I was saying...

SRK: But then again, maybe it was about them, in an indirect way...

MA: Of course, of course...

SRK: Were these people all negative, or were they just wondering about where your position came from?

MA: Well, they said they read it as frustrating...there is a frustration in the text, which I didn't agree with, totally not. One of them said that the first issue was nicer, which it was of course because it is very indirect, more like a research paper. Each of the reviews can be used and continued by others, lets say. It's like choosing an outfit.

SRK: So, you did write all of them, right?

MA: You still didn't know?

SRK: Well, I wasn't sure because you could have asked someone to write particularly from a point of view, considering that each essay is written in such a different style than the others. I figured I could find out the truth behind the work during this interview..

MA: What is important to relate here is the difference of style evident in the piece: I personally don't believe in "handschrift" as they say here in Holland, the signature of the artist. I think that every creation is like taking a role, and that the people who aren't conscious of that can only continue in isolation. For me, and as I did in the project *Review*:, I sometimes like to take the role of the literature critic, like in the first issue where I reviewed Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and related it to an artistic action which in the end only existed as text, as a story..

I want to say, what is important for me and interests me is to meet people who don't carry on from a predictable manual, and can surprise you by being someone else, spontaneously.

SRK: In regards to the project *Review*:, and the fact that you are making video/sound work as well, do you consider yourself an artist who works in the public or as a conceptual artist? Do you think there is any work that you have made that defines your working practice as an artist?

MA: No, at least not yet. I think that the course or direction I took is a kind that needs time to manifest itself. Because it is about spreading dots in space, seeing how they find their own way. For example, I am going to place the *Espon Perfection 1260* project in the V2 shop, and a shop in London. And of course, if they put the work in their database then other options might open themselves up to me. I really work per project, and each project is a totally new area for me to discover. It always depends on my

mood and current relationships with people around me, which book I have read or which music I am listening too. All these things.

The definition, to say it simplistically, is: there is no definition. I am kind of like a parrot-like artist, who likes to assimilate for a short period of time or within a certain context. And then, reflect on the situation, come up with a reaction, then leave again.

SRK: It sounds like a very open art practice.

MA: It is an open practice, yes. The other idea I was thinking about was an idea of engagement, which nowadays doesn't necessarily have to have anything to do with art as presented by galleries and museums. Since audio-visual media are not exclusive tools anymore, they have become for many people the means to reflect on reality. So I don't see any point in labeling a certain action as Art over other actions in life. I think galleries and museums are just small fragments of what is really happening in terms of artistic practice and one shouldn't limit oneself to conventional art-spaces.

SRK: How do you support your projects, your artistic activities? Do your activities related to the Wohlfart space in Charlois relate to your activities as an artist?

MA: The Wohlfart, I don't have a real involvement in it. Only occasionally. For example, for the recent Atelier Route in Charlois I made a "Charlois Hit," a song which I called *Charlois Hit*, and I put it in the Wohlfart exhibition and it was to be the "party" song. A few DJ's played it and it did become a hit! The song had lyrics of the different pronunciations of Charlois, variations on the word with a beat behind it. I thought, OK, this works. Now I want to make more hits. But otherwise, when there are programs in the Wohlfart I just usually help make coffee and such. Not any real curatorial work or anything.

For the *Espon Perfection 1260* project I received a subsidy. I am also working on a book that hopefully will be finished next year in December, 2005. I also received subsidy for that. As for the music I make, I finance that myself. One example of how I finance myself is when in 2000, after my house was burned down, I was asked from Lokaal 01 to make a show and I asked them to buy a refrigerator, stove, TV, everything I needed to replace what I lost, and I showed it in the space for three weeks then I took it home! So, in this case, it was a sort of self-efficiency! I have really just started to get into the subsidy requests, and I am not sure if I will continue, because I think it is more interesting to generate finances through your work rather than only spend money on making the work.

SRK: Right now you're making the piece *Espon Perfection 1260*, which you consider a product. You are going to place it stores, for people to purchase. Even though this project is funded, you are going to put it out in a way that you might actually make money from it. I wonder how different that is from just getting subsidies and knowing that the work is already paid to be made, that it doesn't need a financial return...

Otherwise, it wouldn't be a product. In the end, artists can always sell their works, even if it is funded. I don't see any problem.

SRK: This is a big issue for me, coming from the States where we don't have funding. Our artistic funding is so limited that one can say it is almost non-existent. And because of that, almost all artwork made is self-funded, with an idea that as an professional artist you would sell work, take that money to live off of and reinvest in future art pieces—it becomes your personal economy. I think there is a big difference between making artwork with an idea that it has a commodity value versus making work and being able to give it away, as in for free. I am very curious in how the Netherlands has created a context in which, because an artist is funded by subsidy, you really do have the freedom to create work that you can put out in the public space, give it away or let it become lost because it already has been paid for, in a sense.

MA: For me, these products I am making, they have a symbolic value; I haven't even figured out what they will cost yet. I think that they will not provide me with an income, to make me independent, lets say. But, it is part of the context of the work, to be sold.

I also think that art has no excuse in this regards, so if you are funded or not funded, you still have to make good work. I am interested in my works being products because I want them to be separated from the autonomous aura that artworks have, that they can be consumed in contemplation. I guess that if you sell the work, after having been funded, it can become a double hypocrisy. The best way to play with these economic systems related to art is to use the strategies themselves, instead of resisting or putting your hands up. In the end, we are all part of the economic system, whether by making new products or making artwork from trash.

SRK: I would like to switch the topic and ask you about Applegarden, which seems like a big project that is very much in the public and doesn't have any guarantees for making independent through album sales, when you do have an album. What I am interested in making clear is a relation between a certain type of artist and a certain type of musician who gives away their art, music, craft for free without any guarantee of response, value and in the end your gift could be considered to become public property. Or, it is only public property. Like, as in Applegarden, because there is no album yet, the experience of Applegarden can only be had when it is experienced in a public, free way.

MA: Being in Applegarden is very different in that it is a project that I work closely with other people. I enjoy the experience of collaboration. It is connected with, what I said before, taking different roles in your artwork. I find it exciting to be, on one side, the humble artist with small ideas, silent ideas and on the other, screaming in the public as a musician. The contradiction, lets say, is important for my well-being.

I think it is important to have a direct, physical contact with the public. It is compensation to the other, more internal things one might do. The funny thing is, depending on where you perform there is such a big difference to the result. Sometimes, you perform at a place and you totally don't like the ambience. For example, we played recently

in Nijmegen to six hundred people, in a hall and after we played, we basically just had to fuck off! It was totally impersonal and there was no connection with the public, in that instance. I didn't like it. The question then is: "how far do you want to go, when your actions mobilize you in a unpredictable way?"

SRK: I would like to bring up the idea of where an artist is working and how that leads to a development of their work, and maybe what the limits can be to that concept. An example would be artists who make work for institutions via invitation, and travel all over the globe, relating their work to the place they are at, at that moment. I see it as being a mobile artist, versus being called an "international" artist, which I see as someone who has come from one country to another and settled in to make their work that is dependent upon a relationship of where they come from and of the current residing place. And then, there is this play on the whole theme where I thought of new label, the Interstellar Artist, which is a question in an idea of what happens when you can go everywhere and do everything without limits? One question which I intend to ask each interviewee in this issue, and related to this theme, is: do you consider yourself a Dutch artist?

MA: Less than ever. More and more I am realizing (and maybe this is my own personal paranoia) the difference of culture. Not necessarily the difference between the Dutch and the Persian culture, but the difference in understanding the notion of identity. Maybe in the beginning you don't see it, because you only pay attention to the similarities. Or, the older you get, and you move through relationships and collaborations, the differences become more evident. There are two extremes, which are in my opinion caused by a lack of knowledge about the implications and impact of displacement in the world on the meaning of identity. The Dutch are still clumsy dealing with this unstable notion of identity. On the one hand you have this uncritical embarrassment of the other, and on the other hand, the rejection of the unknown or the different.

SRK: So you find yourself identifying more with an international or world citizen, living in Holland for the moment. Have you ever identified with another country? Do you then identify yourself with Iran?

MA: With Iran? Definitely. There are certain things of the culture that I totally identify with, but those are elements that are understood in the poetic sense; they have certain specificity that you can hardly translate it. And that is why they are so precious for me, because they are unique.

In Holland, actually, I am still searching for the home, which means feeling at ease with your surrounding and having a very productive social life. I kind of miss that in Holland.

SRK: And you have been here in Holland for how long?

MA: For nineteen years.

being more mobile, less situated then in Holland, and do you have an urge to move yourself around in the World?

MA: Yes, I have that, but at the same time, I believe you have to have *good luggage to carry*, when you decide to move around. And, you can also go on a good trip in your own house, if you have the right imagination. Maybe the interest I have in distributing my works as products, them being easily transported, is the unconscious fear of having to leave things behind someday. So I make stuff that could fit in a handbag.

SRK: Have you moved around or visited many places in the World to give your self an idea or varied understanding of different ways of living and/or working?

MA: I have been many places in Europe, in Iran, Turkey...but most of it wasn't for holiday purposes, it was a forced moving. And, some were for educational purposes. One of my brothers lives in London, so I visit London quite often. I think, for me, my work has to tell me where to go, and not that I tell myself where to go. It has to happen by itself. Although it suffices, for me, if my work travels on its own.

SRK: In that sense, is being mobile only a self-initiated thing? Or, given the opportunity to visit a place and make work in relation to that, through a curator, museum...

MA: I had an idea of going to Istanbul, a residency at the Platform Garanti. I was one of the people selected in Rotterdam, but in Istanbul, they said no to everyone from Holland. But, during these decisions, I actually was in Istanbul, and I went to talk to them. It was quite nice, and they said that I could always come to do my own thing, if I sent a direct proposal to them and as long as the project was personally financed by me.

I prefer if my work triggers reactions that result in a trip, a project. I have never really thought of going somewhere and then seeing what happens. I think it is because I have this approach that all my work can be done anywhere at anytime, from relationships you create, not necessarily associated to being in a certain place. It could happen within the context of being a visiting artist, but it is not the main issue for me.

SRK: I think this statement relates to what you said earlier, how your work or working practice exists via a relation to being here, which is Rotterdam at the moment. What you are saying is your work in no way needs to identify with Rotterdam; it is that simply by being here in Rotterdam, the place informs your work. They are connected and it makes sense that they would be. And still your work remains open, absorbs outside influences related to place and gives you a certain position...

I want to bring up now another theme, longevity, as it relates to you and your work. To explain further, there is an inherent idea that your artwork and your actions can live on and apart from you, into the future.

MA: Well, history tells in the end. I think you can deal with it consciously, while you are alive, or you can let happen by itself—anyway, history tells. I like the

idea, that during my lifetime, to work with an idea of things living their own life. And, give them the opportunity to do so; give them ground, for that, to come back and surprise me. That is one of the reasons why I make this kind of work that is distributable, because it has the potential of finding itself in different contexts and therefore you can get many different types of feedback, and learn from the feedback. While if you show in the gallery and there is a review about your work and the context is immediately fixed, then you are being showed as a type of sculptor, which can be very interesting, but is fixed...I am quite allergic to that. I want to be able to say something today, and tomorrow say the opposite. I want to create the basis of the necessity of my work myself and not let it be determined by the needs of the institutional discourses.

SRK: You don't want to be pigeonholed, which is a kind of saying in English...

MA: Of course, in the end, you have the power, even in a controlled environment like an institution or gallery, to direct the way people see you, see your work. But, there is a difference. Art in institutions is always decided upon by a chain of curators who follow their own strategies, and artists are more and more tools for these curators to support their ideas. And more and more artists make artwork that can comply with the standards put by the curators. I don't want to spend my time explaining why this work doesn't have anything to do with that work for example, which is necessary in a institutional context.

SRK: Which could take the excitement from the work itself, if you have to continually explain yourself over and over again.

MA: There is no problem with explaining what you do. When tomorrow, for example, I make a new work and distribute it and no one knows about my previous work, then they will ask me only about that work, and I will tell them why I made it. And, in ten other places, ten other relationships between a viewer and other work are forming, which do not need to necessarily be connected by a continual style within all the works. This is what I like, the separateness of multiple contexts.

SRK: So, for example, people in Rotterdam know you as Maziar who plays in the band Applegarden, while people in London know you are Maziar who makes audio/video based objects/products.

MA: And, because of this, there is no need to tell the people in London that I play in Applegarden. If they find out in the end, well, that is out of my control.

SRK: I have had a similar experience since living in Holland: I became another person, another artist so to say, disconnected with the time before Holland. What you have brought up with your own experience, in this interview, is the idea that anyway, people don't need to understand my practice or the work individually, through an understanding of the whole, nor should I be expected to relate the work together, as a sort of continual thought in my artistic practice. I am glad to hear you explain your position as an artist because I think in the recent past I have been questioning how to reconcile the varied works that I have made in the past few years...

MA: It is very interesting, I like this survival, these new strategies to explain or express your self. I remember when back in the academy, I didn't have the money to buy materials, so I got a hold of paper from old exhibition catalogues, and for a whole year, I made art with that material because it was all I had. It was such fun, such a great moment.

SRK: I think it is a survival strategy in that you realize that you have a need to express yourself still, even if you don't have the means to make something in particular. How that changes your own activities is strange, but interesting. You know, we live in an artistic climate that does allow artists to make artwork with anything, in any way. This I think is a direct result of Modernism. Because of this situation, there is always the question you have to ask yourself: how much are you willing to learn about the craft, the material and the need? Just because all is possible in no way means that it is necessary to work with everything. Which is essentially saying one needs to give him or herself an education...

MA: Exactly, this is the point that is quite important. I think there is an attitude that we take things for granted, here and there. And, maybe this is why there is also not so much dialogue, because of the idea of "what you do is what you get," so there is no reason to talk about it. One has to create challenges for oneself by continually questioning ones choices within the artwork, and that is the legacy of postmodernism, isn't it?

SRK: To stay with this train of thought, on education and learning, on dialogue, do you associate your work within or identify with any particular movement or genre?

MA: Here and there, in my work, I can see certain connections with other artist's work. Until recently, my whole motivation to make art was how to get rid of this "taking for granted" education, the education from modernism, an education from school. Everything I have made has an idea to it that it comes from somewhere else, that it comes from a place that has no empirical relationship to me but more an academic one. Every time, this "thing" re-appears. Because of this, I think I have to make as many works in different styles as possible. In order to understand the origin. In the end, how I relate these styles, how I accumulate them, will start to inform my *own* style. I cannot say that I am an extension of art history—it is simply the fact that art history does exist and it has an impact on my work by way of form, color, contexts, concepts, etc. I deal with art history in this way, that I have to build up a resistance to it. Maybe that resistance is then my form!

SRK: Do you see your work as having either a stronger connection to the future or the past?

MA: More of an idea to a vacuum, maybe!! Somehow, it is more the feeling of a gap in the time-space that was never meant to be, like in Star Trek, you have sometimes these strange lapses in time-space that will eventually disappear.

SRK: Do you feel then that your work needs to be experienced in the now? What about its longevity, its future relationships?

MA: Yes, the now is most important. What I do is building a strategy, to avoid labels for the future based on what was made in the past, to be as diverse as possible, to remain ungraspable, but, if you take your time with the works, you could see where they have come from. I think in thirty years I will make an artist book that shows all the work together...

SRK: I agree with that idea, even if it has an inherent joke to it. If at one point you want to gather the many different works you have done, it also provides you as an artist a different way of seeing your own progression...

MA: The thing is, also, what to choose? You can choose concrete projects you have made or you can choose thousands of digital pictures from over the years and put them in a book. These pictures connect to a certain point and time and a place as much as any artworks do. They reflect the situation of your life in which you took them as well as having their own visual quality. Looking back on your history should include both: your concrete projects as well as unintended, purposeless creations, those with dust on them.

SRK: These small leftovers, like notes on paper, do somehow fit into our projects, definitely. Most people, who are involved in making artwork, I think they know that these small things, which often exist in the environment of the studio you work in, influence the work you make.

MA: One more thing that I want to add is that my work is somehow the exclusion of many things—this is what actually shapes the work. It is not necessarily a reduction-ist approach but rather an accumulation of the negative: the absence is the presence. For example, when I represent a work by means of a photograph the work itself might not exist, and when I do show the photograph it is not a representation of the work but rather a continuation of it. I cant help seeing a documentation of your work as a piece on itself, hence the dubious relationship between the work and its documentation. That is what I mean with a sense of absence...



The conversation between Jetske and I took place in her studio at the Piet Zwart Institute, over tea, on December 21, 2004.

SRK: I asked for an interview with you because I thought the themes of giving art away for free as an idea of public property, the mobile artist and longevity within the artwork applied to your recent projects. I wanted to know your thoughts on these issues, so here we are. I know your recent work related to the STOP project, but maybe it would be a good idea if you start with telling how you arrived at the STOP project and what came before...

JdB: I come from Groningen, where I attended art school at Minerva, Groningen. One year after Minerva, I decided to move to Rotterdam because I felt Groningen was too small, for the things I wanted to do. I graduated as a painter, and I was making these small miniature paintings, which had a relation to text and an obsession to what was happening in contemporary society. Looking at the tradition that painting has, it really wasn't the best medium I could have chosen to address social/government structures.

I then moved to Rotterdam, and after some trips to Romania and Bulgaria shortly thereafter, I really arrived in this totally new world that is Rotterdam. Groningen is a little student city where everything is nice, bright and shining. Then I came here to Rotterdam, with all the different neighborhoods—it was more dark. I was intrigued how you can have all these neighborhoods, from Kralingen with all its fancy homes and streets to the South of Rotterdam that has big families who have much less.

There was a project in the city hall called *Ruimte Bezetten*, which I was involved with, as collaboration with another woman named Mildred Volkonet. In the city hall, we made a project that was influenced by all the positive statements I read about how multicultural Rotterdam was, its social background and the social origin of the city. All the positive slogans you found in the city hall...it was just amazing. I was intrigued how people would react to these slogans, when placed in an environment outside city hall. These days you cannot imagine these slogans in the city hall anymore. Our particular project for *Ruimte Bezetten* was a virus, which were objects made of soft materials (fibers and tape) that were made inside the city hall offices—everyday we just made more and more of them. We were curious what would happen if we made these unexpected/unknown things and placed them in the environment of city hall, to see what happened, what would be the reaction of the people in the city hall, if they could accept an odd addition to a normal working environment. We worked on this project for two months.

My individual work at that time was mostly drawings, which is also what I entered the Piet Zwart Institute with. I was working with drawing a lot, but it didn't work well with where I wanted to go, which was my interest in how social models function, how life is organized, how it is always so difficult to make progress through bureaucracy. This is how I came to the first step in the direction of STOP, which was an idea

to make a guided tour, to tell some thing about the environment we live in, to explain it a bit different than how we normally assume it is arranged, to suggest a *new conclusion*. From this idea I developed a guided tour in Brussels, which was a project about legal and public space. I then made a second guided tour in the city center of Rotterdam, as a follow up piece. At this time it was the end of my first year at PZI, and I decided this way of working needed a complete framework, and a function. Without a framework, the two first projects where just telling weird stories—and it was more than just telling stories, for me. The structure of STOP is what I have been working on since the last one and a half years.

SRK: So the STOP project began when you entered the Piet Zwart Institute?

JdB: A little later, about a half-year later. Because PZI is a program that is focused on social space, and from living in Rotterdam it is more logical for you as an artist to relate to the social space, I developed work from these influences.

SRK: You mentioned earlier that you came to Rotterdam from Groningen, and then traveled for a while in Bulgaria and Romania. How did this moving around effect your ideas or your working practice? Did you travel there in the “role of an artist” and/or how did that influence your work?

JdB: I traveled under this role of an artist, but not specifically to *do* something there—just to observe and to see what is going on in those places. For example, I am very interested in public transit, in trains, how they are connected, how you can travel from city to city. When I was first in Romania, I was just observing the people, from low to high class, how they all take the train. Some have automobiles, but the whole population takes trains—in one coupe you can share a space with eight people. You spend with them the whole night, the whole day during your own travel, and you begin to talk with them, about their lives, playing games, card games, and being more specific with your opinions. They also become interested in you. There is something special to life related to travel—a social gap is closed.

One other thing I observed is how the Romanian people talked about the Bulgarian people. The Romanians really warned us about Bulgaria, saying it was the most dangerous country in Europe. When we were in Bulgaria, we found that they said the same things about Romania! They are very different countries, but they are both very poor. The differences in culture, class and the way people lived was something I thought to bring back with me to Rotterdam, to apply to what I see happening in Rotterdam with class and people being poor, separated. How can I define the social differences in Rotterdam? If see a group of people in Rotterdam who are poor and I compare them to people in Romania, it is interesting to ask how each group deals with their living situations, how they both handle the social structures. It was interesting for me to come back to Rotterdam, which I do consider quite rich compared to Eastern Europe, but to compare the way some people live in certain parts of Rotterdam, one can see that their lives are not much brighter than a citizen in Romania.

SRK: When you traveled to Romania and Bulgaria, did you introduce yourself as an artist to those people?

JdB: No. There are sometimes I go somewhere and I don't even use a camera, I just want to see what happens without relying on exotic pictures to explain it to me. Photography is a large part of my work, but when I am observing I just drink coffee at the café and observe the society around me, to find my way into little villages without knowing just where you will end up. I just want to talk with people, without saying I am an artist. It creates such a position...

SRK: From what you're saying—and let me make sure I have this correct—you are more interested in observing what happens in the *other* place and using it as source material for artwork back in Rotterdam, more so than going to this other place and making work there, developing work for that place. I don't know if that is intentional on your part or not...

JdB: If you go somewhere and you bring that experience back with you, you transform it, the reality of it, to another understanding. You then have the freedom to manipulate it as you want. You can use it in comparison to something else or to create another reality. It is much different than identifying, then reacting, on some social problem in this foreign place. For me, as an artist, I *could* go to a foreign place and make a project and it could be nice, but I would rather think about what is happening there and how I can transform it, relate it and put it in another direction in the place I live in. I would rather absorb information and then spend time digesting it and making a project from that—it is something that is just part of my life, how I choose to react on my experiences.

SRK: But you are also, to a certain extent and with the work you are currently making in the project STOP, fictionalizing the information. You are “making up,” as you said, a new reality. How do you relate this fictionalizing of your traveling experiences to your projects?

JdB: I would say it is on one hand fictionalizing, as I bring in my own subject or subjects that might not be possible in reality, and on the other hand, I would not call it fiction because the work is based on existing models. I am more interested in giving information a new direction. Like for example, when you read a detective story, there always are signs which direct you to a murderer, but the detective always has a special knowledge that takes him to the real murderer, and the story comes to a different conclusion than the one you had prepared yourself for. I like to apply this to my field: what happens when one comes to another conclusion? What is the difference between the conclusions, the one you have imagined versus the one that is told to you in a story? I have to point out that it is not only fiction that enters my work.

SRK: Do you have any limits or have you found any limits in yourself as an artist, when traveling to a new place to research or investigate?

JdB: For limits, I think that time is the biggest limitation. After PZI, I really

want to travel to a place, anonymously, and stay there for a long time. I would like to go to Katowice, a city in the South of Poland that I passed through a few years ago. I was intrigued with the big factories and the many urban areas that had people who just seemed to be waiting around for something, I don't know what, but something. I would like to give myself the opportunity to stay in one place for a long time, a few weeks or longer, in order to really start to see details in the landscape. Giving yourself a longer period of time to explore a place takes you beyond a generalization of that place.

SRK: It sounds like you are often looking at the social structures of any one particular place you visit, but I am curious, have you ever taken any social studies or sociology studies from an academy? Do you think an artist can function as a “social emissary” or social educator?

JdB: That is interesting, because as an artist, I am not so interested in what is *exactly* happening at any one place, not interested in a specific, concrete group, with a specific, concrete agenda. Maybe it implies that I fall in generalities, but that is not my aim, period. I am more interested in the general way of society, how ways of living are affected by the particular society around it, or ways of organizing daily life. I am interested in looking at moralistic patterns, religious ways. For example, like looking at how people in particular places react in the supermarket. In Holland, people stand in a queue, and life is adjusted to this fact of always having to wait in a queue to buy your goods at the supermarket. But, if you go to Romania, nobody bothers to stay in a correct position in the line! There is random conversation, more interaction between different queues. It is just chaotic—they get angry at nothing and totally crazy! But then five minutes later they are quiet again and say nothing. I am interested in bringing into my work an investigation of the differences between ways of going about daily life.

SRK: When you are making your work, based off of your experiences of different cultures, are you making it specifically as a reference to Dutch culture? Or do you think your current projects, like STOP, could be applied to different places, different countries?

JdB: When I look at STOP, it is formatted after the Dutch nomenclatura government. It is definitely based on the mushrooming of Dutch governmental agencies to further regulate what you and I can or cannot do and think in society. It is based on how in Dutch society, over the last few years, we have more and more rules and regulations that we must follow, as well as new names for bureaucratic organizations in the government—and those are all the time changing still! I found that STOP was a reaction to these ways of the Dutch government.

In the Netherlands, we want to make life more efficient and more regulated. The way that I respond to this bureaucracy and how it affects my life as a Dutch citizen is revealed in the STOP project, by using the brochures of the government itself as a model to challenge the open and liberal society that Holland calls itself. What I feel, what I read in the newspapers and what I see in the street, as an example of the ways of living in Rotterdam, are sources for STOP, so in this way I would say it is specific to the Netherlands.

SRK: Do you consider yourself a Dutch artist? How does that play into your work?

JdB: I think that since I have been at Piet Zwart Institute for the last two years, that I studied art in Groningen before that and have been traveling around Europe, I try to find out what my position is as a Dutch artist. I am totally Dutch because I have grown up in Dutch society, especially coming from the countryside of Friesland, in a place where everyone knows each other and there is a certain type of closed community. For the future, I would want to work outside of Dutch society, work within other cultural contexts. Yet, when I look at my behavior, like the way I make appointments for example, I can see that I am really Dutch! It is interesting, and good, to be able to see myself as this way.

SRK: The reason I ask this question is personal: as I have been here for three years, I have had an American friend comment offhandedly that part of me has become a bit Dutch. I was shocked by that comment, by not actually knowing what constitutes “being Dutch” in way that someone else could adopt it, through simply living in the society. Is it a social conditioning? Was it because the artwork I make has taken various turns since arriving here? So, do you think there are characteristics of “being Dutch” in the arts, in the artwork itself?

JdB: That is interesting and something that I don’t know exactly, but that I think about often. In one way, I very much like the local position, the *Dutch position*, you could say. I also like that here in Rotterdam you have many people from all over the World and we are mingling in this one big pot of soup. But, seriously, I am Dutch and I have that background and I *have* to deal with that. If you look at Dutch art, you have to understand that work in the 1990’s was not really political, like activist political—it was always moderated, well at least that is my main opinion, but that does not mean that it did not exist. It is just how you look at it. So, it has never had very big extremes. It might be my lack of knowledge or my lack of experience, that I can’t tell you of people who tried to break out of this way of working, so I often think that Dutch artwork is too moderated. If I then look at the aesthetics I applied to STOP, based on government and other bureaucratic models, I can see how moderated the style is, totally unseen, not striking. What I try do then do is make the content more striking, in direct contrast to the aesthetics.

In Dutch society, at a certain point, there are so many subsidies that it makes it easy for artists to do whatever they want to do. If you go to other countries, and compare the situation to Holland, you see that the Dutch artist has had quite a luxurious position. I am actually curious how Dutch art will develop as the subsidy system declines (which it currently is, based on new decisions on funding adopted by the seated government).

SRK: It seems then that STOP, as a project, can really allow you to take your own investigations outside of Holland, if you so desire.

JdB: I think STOP is interested in aspects of society that are always changing, that are always moving, the ins and outs or fluctuation of people and ideas in society. I am intrigued by how you can process data, how you can manipulate it, how you can almost determine the outcome from it. STOP exists as an agency that can

regulate the regulation, that can help regulate the Dutch society, but under different conditions. I am specifically interested in transformation, and STOP is about changing policy, just as a governmental agency would. STOP, for example, investigates issues of long-term policy in the Dutch government, but specifically why the outcomes of the policy never manifest, why the policy itself always continues to change, essentially never coming to any conclusion, ever. How is it possible that policy always changes, from one direction to another direction and we as citizens accept this without any disagreement? Therefore, since STOP is about looking at the system behind government, ways of living of the people or how government is supposed to provide a certain amount of security to our daily lives, it has to remain, to a certain extent, local to one place. It is difficult to say whether STOP is a project to look at other governments, since it is based so much on the Dutch way of government and policy.

SRK: STOP has a mission to look closely at governmental agencies and how they are involved in the construction of society, to make a short synopsis, but you, as the artist who is controlling STOP, you are not only making an art piece you *are* the art piece at the same time. And, all the ways in which STOP exists are self-initiated—it seems like you see something in the Rotterdam society and you write about it, make a guided tour or brochures. How do you go about putting the work STOP, and yourself, out in the public?

JdB: This is the most interesting part for STOP, because I relate it back to the idea of a virus, something that is spreading and growing without control or knowing the outcome. With the brochures, I like to spread it out wherever it seems to fit. In this way, by freely placing the brochures in the public, people from all different parts of society can react on it.

In the middle of 2004 I had an information desk in TENT, as part of the PZI graduation exhibition, which presented slide presentations, brochures and hosted guided tours. With the guided tours, people were actually taken outside into Rotterdam to visit the so-called “research zones” of STOP.

There are also the possibilities of the Internet, which I still doubt how I can bring STOP to be useful via the Internet. Until now, I have used more conventional mediums of print to explain STOP to the public. I am most interested in bringing my research through STOP to the Internet because the Internet is supposed to be a *free space*.

Sometimes you read a theory, and you think that it is quite crazy, but you then realize that it might actually exist. If it would be true, how would it then affect our way of living, our way of thinking? If you look at society, if you can get away from your assumptions or a dogmatic way of thinking about it, you can open yourself up to what might seem like crazy theories, at least in the beginning. This is why STOP is interested in specific research on fear and memory, because I want to know why people constrain themselves to a behavior, or why can someone not be open to new ideas or theories? This is why the Internet is interesting to STOP as a research tool, because it is free, you come across many new ideas, which might not be true at all, because every and any

person can put their own ideas on the Internet freely to be accessed. You can come across some strange ideas...

SRK: It seems to me that it was a big step for you to go from painting and drawing to the STOP project, which seems to exist outside the studio and possibly outside a normal idea of the art object—it is like you are pushing your own idea about how information is organized out into the world via an art context, and at the same time, what you are pushing is a parody of what actually goes on in the culture, the Dutch culture. I have experienced, in reading about STOP, that STOP takes many ideas related to government control to the extreme...it seems that you also *need* people to witness this project, to come into a direct relation/contact with the project, in order for it to exist as a piece of artwork we can talk about.

JdB: It is true, because many parts of the STOP project depend on improvisation. In the guided tours, for example, people are allowed to ask questions of the tour guide, and when I tell a story to the tour group that STOP has parakeets and canaries in cages in this certain courtyard that are installed to influence the brain frequency of humans, to alter the waves in thinking, to change certain social and mental behavior, people start to ask questions, like how does STOP take care of the birds and how does STOP regulate the frequencies in order to affect humans in a specific way? They want to know what is the difference between the frequency of the canary and parakeet—you get these types of questions on the spot. It is this interaction between the audience and myself that is an important play in the artwork. To play with an idea that what you see isn't actually what you think it is! Therefore, I try to breakup old ways of looking at things in our environment and generate new thoughts. In some ways it is a parody of the Dutch society by focusing on ideas of regulating society, regulating thinking in people. On the other hand, I just want to create a situation where people just think about their daily life. This is why STOP is a governmental agency in itself. You never know, maybe in a year it will change and go public!

SRK: Do you think that STOP has a limit? Do you think you have created a structure upon which you can work indefinitely as an artist?

JdB: Well, I hope I can work indefinitely with it, because what I actually don't want is for it to become a structure based solely on government, because I think after a while it will lose its interest for me. It would become just an object. I want to keep it open to the unpredictable elements of society, which it is in itself dealing with as a topic. Because STOP deals with the unpredictability of ideas, it needs to remain open to new ideas and new forms.

To go back to your earlier question about how STOP is related to my earlier work in painting and drawing, when I draw and paint, I am bringing in information from the outside world and I transform it into an image from my personal point of view. What I do with STOP is more or less the same, yet it is not only my point of view anymore because I borrow other people's ideas and theories to put together a new narrative. I like this creation of new narratives about my environment and observations of the

real world, transformed through a combination of language, storytelling and visual information. STOP, at the moment, is looking at general ways of living and how we are affected by government regulation, but STOP could always take a turn and start research on the art world!

SRK: Hypothetically, if real government started to change its policies and initiated more progressive ideals and attempted to reduce confusion and fear in society, would the project STOP have nothing more to say and therefore...stop?

JdB: This is an interesting model, because STOP can also be a mind game: STOP can change its focus onto changing gravity, changing weather patterns or making artificial systems that are beyond the scope of normal government. STOP is about observing, and as long as there are families, communities and groups organizing themselves, STOP will have a function of always providing an alternative view on policy.

SRK: Is STOP based on Utopian ideology?

JdB: STOP is based on community thinking, focusing on small groups that are like-minded. But, STOP sees Utopia as a certain type of model, and it is good if STOP can step outside of that model from time to time. STOP is about changing vision, so if it was applied to a Utopian society...I like to play with elements, whether that is exaggerating the positive or exaggerating the negative aspects of society.

SRK: Like, what would happen if you introduced the possibility of extreme happiness as a reality in society?

JdB: Yes, exactly. You can then do research on the possibilities of extreme happiness or even extreme fear. What I am trying to do with STOP is begin a discussion about different possibilities, to trigger new thoughts through playing a game about different possibilities in life. STOP exists to bring about possibilities of “what would it be like if...,” then treat that alternative way of living as if it was normal, even if it is quite extreme and almost impossible to exist.

SRK: Do you think that STOP is more relating to the past or the future, in either a social or personal way?

JdB: I think it is totally contemporary, actually. If you look at what is being presented in newspapers, for example, how writers are writing that Dutch people are looking to go back to traditional values or ask themselves issues of identity, like who are the real Dutch, you realize that people in this society are questioning whether society is in *decay*. There is a lot of confusion over how to approach living in this society. In this way, I think I am quite contemporary with STOP, because I deal exactly with these same questions, about how to change or how not to change the way in which you live. In this way, some people in Dutch society are saying that after thirty or forty years of a free and open society, we have lost control of it. STOP is exactly looking at the issues of control in society, with both scenarios of total control of society as well as asking the question, what if

total freedom *did* exist? What could happen if one could *really* do whatever they wanted? I think people, in general, are always afraid of losing their sense of reality.

For me, it is very important in how the audience reacts to the STOP project, because that reaction in itself can be used for another type of research: the research on people's reactions to extreme regulations! It is a nice feedback system that I want and need to continue this project. As an artist, it is important to see what you get back, from the work, when you expect so much from your audience—especially in a situation where people come to an art-related venue and people only expect to *see* something, where they just look and don't have to read, even more so something like STOP, where there is a question whether it is even art. I think that as long as I utilize a government organization style, people might just think it is useless information and through it away. But, I like to play with what *will* happen if people give the time to read it. Or, what will happen when I let someone else give a guided tour; what is the outcome, what is the reaction to STOP when it becomes less personal, less associated with me as an artist? It is challenging for me as an artist to play with these issues of authenticity.

SRK: Do you prefer people to see this as an artwork or for people to come to STOP *as* an official, governmental agency? How do you position STOP to undertake an *own* identity?

JdB: STOP doesn't need to be seen as art, although it is art, as art creates freedom of thought for me, which in turn is why STOP exists. As an artist, I can do what I want to do and I don't have to adjust to the rules associated with say social research that takes place at a university. I have no boss, no professor. As an artist I can step outside of those constraints. I realize though, watching the reactions of my audience, that those outside the context of art can see this more as nonsense, while people who are artists or are interested in art relate to STOP more—people in the art scene are more used to an alternative way of thinking...

SRK: Well, this is in itself interesting because it says something about how people come to the work, because if artists come to see art in an art context and are "ready" for an "experience of art," your work becomes set in a context. However, those who find the STOP project without realizing it is art can possibly have a more free interpretation. But STOP also contains a bit of theater: there is a story, actors, namely yourself and a program that you follow when setting up guided tours.

JdB: Of course, I have to make a role for myself. I have to convince people and be reliable. And how am I reliable? To not look as I look normally; I mean that I dress up for the part. I try to be professional looking. Of course, I cannot look like I just jumped out of bed! I take care to represent STOP *as if* it was a real agency. You have to pay attention to the movements you make, my whole body attitude. But, that is not just theater. If you go to any business presentation, you will find the same thing as people in business work hard to present their selves. In this sense, there is a model for guided tours, which I try to follow. I bring in my experience with every tour I have taken, as a research to the project, and try to follow those guidelines. An example that I have utilized for

STOP is the work of Andrea Francen, who also plays with the way museum information is normally expected, however, if you look at the actions she makes, it is so deftly played. Actually, I think this way that she acts in her guided tours is a pity, because the way she acts is too much of a characterization, a personality. I find it *too* much of an act...

SRK: How does STOP get its funding, for all its varied activities...

JdB: Well, so far it has been the Dutch State! There is of course some private funding, but it is limited. For the future, we are a bit unsure. You know, the research is quite expensive...but at the moment we have cooperation with a few universities that provide additional funds.

SRK: You do have data that you could sell, no?

JdB: Exactly. We try to negotiate with private investors, companies—people from other countries are also interested in what we have discovered concerning Dutch society. In the end, we might become a fully self-supporting private organization...



Marc Bijl

This interview took place via email from Dec. 15th through Jan. 13th, 2005. I can't say what Marc was doing when behind the computer screen, but my questions and responses were often made early in the morning and with a cup of coffee.

SRK: I would like to ask you to quickly introduce yourself, what you are doing at the moment and any other relevant information you want to give.

Marc Bijl: My name is Marc Bijl, I'm 32, currently staying in New York at the ISCP residency (<http://www.iscp-nyc.org/>). I am a sculptor/interventionist working with different media. I am mainly interested in the way society is constructed in an order and how (and why) the human being likes it that way. Coming from a sub-cultural background (related to Gothic music, squatting) I found similarities in the way different cultures are organized, mainly through a use of icons, slogans, sound-bites, symbols, etc.

SRK: From what I know of your work, you work in the public space, or place yourself in the public space and document your actions and then place that documentation within a gallery environment or as an exhibition. You make works and actions sometimes without notification, sometimes possibly illegal. Why have you chosen to work in a more "public" form, and how does that differ from working in either an academic or institutional capacity? Do you feel a greater connection to the public space over the gallery or the institution?

MB: I also work in a gallery environment or with institutes—they are another "stage" to work on. Working outdoors is more of a sketchbook, one that provides the right aesthetics and atmosphere that you can't find in an institute or gallery. To recreate those findings (from outdoors) in the gallery environment is the tricky thing. I have also decided to not work with that topic from an architectural point of view. I let my (video) performances function as a more traditional work of art when it is presented indoors. I consider my subject matter as broad and it is not my intention to work outdoors constantly—whatever is needed to get the message across. There are structures and there are symbols to a structure; do you need them in order to understand the way the world is structured? I do sometimes, and sometimes I hate them...Inside-outside/private-public/life-death/etc.

SRK: I like how you refer to the gallery or institution as a stage. It implies that one can direct it or orchestrate an experience. It makes me think of a section of text from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*:

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts..."

While in the past you have manipulated corporate icons and symbols, have you had the desire to create your own?

MB: Yes, but not in a simplified way such as making corporate logos, instead more as an idea of what *branding* is today—a way of life. If I could choose, I would be a different brand everyday, to try not to be a target for marketers, simply by denying

myself as a target. But then you automatically become a “symbol” for the counterpart; there are businesses interested in those people as well (think Adbusters, Indymedia).

SRK: What are the different reactions to your work, based on whether people experience them in real life (seeing them in the public space) versus seeing the work in its film/documentation form?

MB: Yes, there is a different reaction because people in a gallery space or institute are aware of the fact that they are entering an art-space—it is one context. People in an everyday environment, like a shopping street, are another context, and not necessarily looking for art and they become characters when in the presence of the work of art (like extra’s in a movie). In an art-space, where the video is being presented, people watch it as in a movie theater. With interventions I make, it is in the context of public/private. Since its not my foremost topic (public/private), I would say that the work has more to do with symbolic icons and rules that simplify our life (like, rules that give it a structure). Life itself has its contradictions—it often shows the borders of our artificial structures that we ourselves have created.

SRK: Since you make sculpture and interventions in both the gallery and the public space, do you approach them differently (the creation of the work) depending on the location?

MB: Yes, but not for a reason related to this public/private issue; more with practical decisions. I do my best to deny the existence of in and outdoor, as long as the *image* that is created suits my *play*—in other words, when I like what I see or want to point out (in a way a traditional expressionistic idea about art) I am concerned with *that*, but within the aesthetics of the times we are living in...

SRK: Even though you are not addressing the issue of public/private directly in your work, I would assume that the general issue of public/private property is a strong focus or dialogue in your work: graffiti works, repainting public basketball courts, installing sculptures in the public space, all these works become a sort of public property, because since you don’t “own” the physical location yourself (as the artist), one could say that no one/everyone owns them. I don’t mean to say that your work must be owned in particular, but I am talking about an idea of experience, as public property. I am trying to introduce an idea of *art as public property*, to say that artworks placed freely in the public space allow everyone to experience them. This is in contrast to artworks that become owned by an individual and are often never seen in the public space, only say in someone else’ living room, for example.

Do you consider your work as anti-corporate, or yourself as an artist that is particularly opposing corporate ideas?

MB: I agree that the works in public space have a very public access—an intervention I did using a Nike swoosh in concrete on this playground in Berlin was directly removed and destroyed by the kids who wanted to play ball; in the subway performance (*In Search Of The Suspicious*) there was a lot of reactions by the public and police, so

yes, it becomes “public property,” although the producer is the artist (who in these cases NEEDS the audience to finish the work!).

I don't consider my work anti-corporate, but I do oppose corporate ideas in all walks of life—alternative, left-wing, hippie living communes and the Nike Corp. have a lot of similarities—or, a certain amount of people share the same vision and they would like to spread it out like a religion. I don't like those ideas, as I am extremely individualistic.

SRK: Do you ever have reservations about using people in your work without them knowing that they are participants in an artwork?

MB: No. At least they are not being forced in a cheap way; they can always step out or sue me if they think that they have been fooled. I dislike the idea of paying some poor people a bit of money (to cover yourself!) to do stupid things (like in Santiago Sierra's piece's) in order to show economic exploitation in the context of art. Who doesn't already know by now that the world is run like that?

My way of working is more risky (I once had a video-shoot in the museum Dresden with all kind of restrictions: do not show the director and vice-director and his new girlfriend together and to not show Arnout Mik's piece. I also couldn't show weapons or use the intercom, etc). In the end we violated them all and the video was not in the exhibition, while Santiago Sierra's piece about so-called *money-power-structures* is. It is all relative to the size of the wound you put the salt in...

SRK: Can you talk a bit more about the “aesthetics of the times we are living in?” Where does your sculpture fit in with the contemporary aesthetics of our time?

MB: In ten years time my sculpture will most likely be outdated, and my works will be nothing more than a sign of that time. I use the stuff that surrounds us all at *this* moment. I am not looking to make my own “handwriting.”

The threats, the security, the religions, the freedom, all those *zeitgeist* topics of today I mix with my personal, (sub)cultural background (gothic music, squatting, DIY-mentality) and my interest in structures and symbolic icons.

SRK: What were the first actions/works you produced that led you to working as an interventionist/sculptor?

MB: It was a performance at the Sony Center in Berlin where I wanted to see who would react on me singing with a guitar, singing *Keep On Rocking In The Free World*. The Sony Center presents itself as public space, but it isn't, it is private property—I knew I was interested in this fact of life while making stickers in Berlin, and through stickers I became more aware of public sites.

SRK: You mentioned earlier in this interview that you have a somewhat traditional expressionist ideology at play in your work, tied to contemporary aesthetics and your sub-cultural background—while you are not searching for a signature or

“handwriting” in technique, somehow I think that your individual identity becomes so tied into the artworks that a reflection of self IS evident in the work, which could be interpreted as a type of handwriting. Maybe it is a good thing that others can identify a work as a Marc Bijl piece...

MB: It is a bit of a strange situation at this moment, if people are walking in my studio in New York, telling me what work I *could* do that would be so relevant to what I am interested in—basically, I think that is a good development, cause then I have struck a chord there and I didn’t need the handwriting bit! I have read that people also advised Andy Warhol, although he had many people around him. Here at the ISCP it is quieter, so every dialogue is welcome. We all live in the same world so I am very interested in other viewpoints to contrast against my own. It is better than totally not having a clue at all about my works!

SRK: Or, maybe others begin to identify more with the individual Marc Bijl?

MB: That would be even better. Because its a common thing I am doing (at least among artists), a bit of roaming the city wondering about who owns the spaces, a bit of music, a bit of partying, a bit of being pissed off about politics and life in general, a bit of *weltschmerz* and a bit of being a proud father with a nice wife and a nice kiddy who wants the best for the future. I know, all cliché’s...

SRK: In the last few years you have been traveling to other countries and making work in different cultural climates. Has there been different reactions to your work in these foreign countries versus in the Netherlands? How do these trips develop and what is your main reason for keeping up this activity?

MB: I am not an adventures type or traveler. However, I did get different reactions to my works in different places and liked that a lot; to be able to talk serious about the stuff I am making, so I kept on going and looking for possibilities to travel to these places to be part of their city, in a way through an artwork that has been developed there. Scandinavia, Istanbul, Athens, Berlin, Paris and now New York. Soon, I am going to Spain and Cypress; it has been a hell of a year(s) and I miss Rotterdam.

Since those residencies/trips to different countries, Dutch curators/museums are interested in my work—I never did post graduate studies because I liked this DIY attitude across the world much better.

SRK: After my first six months in the Netherlands, I was unfortunately without a studio (having ending my residency at Stichting BAD). Being an active artist without a place to make work, I took my ideas to the street, for lack of better words and lack of working space. And in doing so, my actions became as much about the idea behind the work as they were about myself, as an artist. Making more public works had a certain...validity, and a questioning of individual versus public relationships of self.

risk is to take leave of the arts and become real, to be the smuggler and the good to be smuggled, to be the action and not the object is where the new art is to be found.” What is your reaction to this statement/quote?

MB: Ambivalent, but I know where you are—having no studio was the best thing that happened to me because it made me think real hard about the point of it all—what do I really need? Well for a while I could do without a studio, just reading and doing little newspapers (like you are doing right now?), talking, moving around, building up that *need* for a studio for *after* the action.

The studio in Het Wilde Weten (<http://www.hetwildeweten.com/>) was horrible for a while—I am always blaming my studio—then it became this Les33 party-center, and after all that I moved into a small studio in Berlin with Iris newly pregnant, not ideal, then back to Het Wilde Weten where we all had to leave for renovation, etc. Looking back at all this struggling has been effecting my way of working, not within a studio situation but how within a city the artworks develop—how many times are we going to Hema or the Post Office or the Witte Aap Bar or somewhere else? I cannot spend a whole day between four walls, but I still have the desire to find more rest to do so...

Going back to the object is like going back to start all over again, but with more wisdom and luggage now, because of the (action) performances and the experience with urban culture.

SRK: I recently read from Antoni Tapies a piece in which he says: “An artist is totally alone in front of his ‘white canvas,’ and he confronts problems peculiar to art, which has its specific laws as do other intellectual disciplines (philosophy, science, politics) have theirs. No one can counsel or help him. He must look to clarification and guidance from his own solitary experimentation, the struggle with materials and their daily manipulation.” I still believe that there are times when an artist should remain private in the studio, working out their ideas and images/objects, without distraction or outside influence—the struggle for a unique understanding or your process, idea, vision. But, at the same time, working outside the studio and in the public space, works develop and/or are completed through the very *reaction* of the audience—the answer to the work lies in the interpretation from the audience. Do you think that working in the public space has allowed you as an artist to be more open and free with your studio practice?

MB: Oh yes, I don’t like to contemplate in my white studio at all! It is better out there in the streets and letting people be involved in your work. It doesn’t mean social sculptures or “engagement” art with the artless people, it just means: let society be part of your art practice as well. Because, it is.

SRK: Do you find that the people who are visiting your studio are, while trying to tell you something, are also listening to you and learning from you, that there is a dialogue?

MB: Yes, I know there is. It isn’t that I am teaching or preaching. I learn a lot through expressing myself in conversation as well.

SRK: Since you became a mobile artist and traveled to many cities with an intention to develop your work, you have caught the attention of Dutch directors/curators. It seems, from what you wrote, that being the other (being in foreign lands/situations) has given you certain validity with the *familiar* (Dutch culture). How do you react to that?

MB: It only happened because others began addressing me as a Dutch artist, so I started to think about it and give it a (ironic) place in my work. First thing I made after a stay of 3 months in Berlin was a piece (a wall made out of red, white and blue bricks) in the Van Abbe Museum; it was not about Berlin but about where I come from (the wall was a reference to the colors of the Dutch flag).

It is a natural reaction to make work about where you come from, but the art world sometimes has this exotic idea of nationalist cliché's—an artist from Israel should make art about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict (choosing the side of Palestinians is even better!)—a kind of artistic colonialism that the Western Art World likes very much. It is better not to take it too serious but it is ok to refer to it every once in a while. I cannot imagine that you can build a long career on the fact that you are from a certain place; there has to be more creativity involved. Dutch curators look abroad but Dutch artists don't... so in the end you always meet the same artists and curators working abroad. That can give me some status in Holland but it doesn't say anything about the works.

SRK: Do you at this moment consider yourself a Dutch artist?

MB: Yes, I am.

SRK: Do you have an opinion on the role of a Dutch artist in an international society?

MB: Relativism

SRK: In response to working out in the streets, I think many artists see themselves as apart from society, which does not mean above or below—it is more a reaction from feeling that the “public” has lost a sense of value in the action of viewing, let alone understanding, artwork. And, the museum/gallery/institution is often called the last place where art can still find any relationship to a public, because the public comes there knowing what they want and knowing that they will see Art (and I mean that with a capital A).

I agree with you that everyone, including artists, live within Society, so it is active in artwork anyway; we cannot fully set ourselves outside our contemporary existence. But, what separates you as an artist from those that make studio work, small paintings of landscapes, pre-war cubist works or images referencing pure abstraction? Do you, as an individual, give more weight to artwork that engages society over artwork that is an attempt to engage the personal?

MB: No, not by definition; it's the reflection upon society that I like in artworks that have a unique perception of the world, not necessarily those artworks that want to change a part of society or world. I do see myself as an outsider, out of reach

for jobs and a career in a daily routine kind of working environment. In return, I want to have my say on what has always bothered me with our society or group mechanisms, what I experienced before going to art school.

I guess that my reference might be the same as the abstract painter, although it's the aesthetics that are different and more direct (in a last attempt to change something in the mind of the viewer, and not in a self-expressionistic kind of way). I think political changes are only made with arms and (military) warfare, not through art.

SRK: Many of your pieces that have been reviewed and discussed in Holland are artworks that are ironic, challenging the very nature of cultural identity, the politics of being an artist in Holland, of being part of an European Union. Someone might ask you if you ever worry about "biting the hand that feeds you," but in your case, this seems to have gotten your work even more attention. Have you ever asked yourself if you are going too far in your critique?

MB: No! Never. It is about coming to terms with that critique (over subsidy systems, identity, etc.) and actually using it to its full extent, but not misusing it!! Taking the subsidy money for granted, or as a form of income that you "deserved," is the wrong way around. I spend the subsidy money on investing in my art like hell, but I don't buy expensive computers or cameras—that is not my department. I spend it directly on objects, installations and production costs (so to pay the people with good camera's, editing facilities, etc.). I am not in Berlin or New York on a holiday or just for inspiration, so to speak. I am actually showing and producing artwork. The Mondrian Foundation, Rijksakademie, Fonds BVK, etc. (who have funded my activities as an artist) are bureaucrats in a positive kind of way: they are totally distorted in looking at art (in a naive but democratic kind of way) and everyone connected too close with those institutes has lost a "reality-check" with other countries, where there are not such institutes, or if there are, it doesn't say anything about the artist's artwork. The Rotterdam-CBK, Fonds BVK etc. did help me, but that's what it is: help (in the form of money). Dutch art funding is based on a social system; abroad, curators/galleries visit your studio and if they are not so interested, you will notice (they are still looking for adolescent energy in art(ists) I think...).

Speaking of, I NEVER had studio visits in Rotterdam apart from Leontien Coelewijn (from the Stedelijk Museum) and Nieck from Upstream, my gallery now in Amsterdam. Isn't that strange?

SRK: I agree with you that it is strange that you had only two studio visits while you have been in Rotterdam. In your opinion, do you see this as a sign that not many curators/directors are looking to the artists that live in this city? Do you think there is something to be learned from the way artists/curators/directors interact in NYC versus in Rotterdam, or say Amsterdam?

MB: Rotterdam is a good city for art (watch out for the next art fair in Rotterdam (Feb. 2005)). The hottest gallery from LA will be there. However in Rotterdam,

curators are a bit slow and too much focused on Amsterdam still, but the artists who (can afford to) live there are not as good as in Rotterdam!

In New York, it looks like Amsterdam in the same way: artists think that it is important to be part of the NY scene, but more important is the work, so if they cannot develop that (because they have odd jobs “cause of their rents...”) they will not be taken serious by curators, or maybe just for a while (have a few nice shows) and after that they have to go back to working for too expensive rents, expensive life, etc. Most American artists that I like have decided to go and live in Berlin or to some other cheaper place (like Rotterdam) where they can continue working on their art (and stay interesting for curators). Curators are like investors: they won't buy your share if there isn't something artistically to gain.

SRK: I must admit I am surprised to read the numerous comments from you about how you miss Rotterdam and have a general good feeling about what is going on in the arts and culture here. After having been to so many major cities in Europe and now New York, what is it that keeps you looking back at/ coming back to Rotterdam?

MB: Did you see the new Flash Art magazine (Jan/Feb, 2005 issue)? It's all about Rotterdam: a strange city that has a lot of wrong architecture of the seventies; part of Rotterdam's city center is destroyed by “social” housing; due to social government in the seventies, the city center was NOT the place you would like to live if you had any ambitions. In other Dutch cities, the city center is for yuppies. I like Rotterdam that it seems to adjust itself to time, and at this point in time the city center is popular again and the art scene is fantastic (also thanks to social ideas!) with the artist run spaces (although the commercial galleries stay behind). I enjoy the artists (and friends) who are busy with their stuff in a less nervous way then in Amsterdam. In fact a lot of people who studied in Amsterdam (or have a gallery there) end up in Rotterdam because of cheaper rents. It creates a relaxed atmosphere among the artists I think.

SRK: I like what you write, if I interpret it correctly, that Rotterdam is the *right* city because it is so *wrong*. I agree that Rotterdam has a quirky feeling to it: not rich, not poor, not cultured, not completely working class. One of the reasons that I have enjoyed Rotterdam and stayed in Rotterdam is because so many different people, and different artists, can be found in this city, living and working. I have never associated with such a large a group of international people in my life, before Rotterdam. I think that having this variety of perspective in the city that you live in has a positive affect!

I do have to say that I meet just as many people in Rotterdam who appreciate its relaxed-ness as despise it. Some artists that I have talked with casually about this issue of “what's happening” in Rotterdam wish there was more. Instead of saying to them, as a response, go find your idea of “more” in another city, one should say go find a way of bringing some more excitement to the arts into Rotterdam. I would also like to see the gallery scene get a little more busy and ambitious. But, first and foremost, I would like to see Rotterdam galleries put more effort into finding, working with and exhibiting the artists who are currently in Rotterdam.

You mention a few times in your responses that the artists you like the most are also your friends. For you, is the love for art directly connected to a social experience?

MB: Now that you mention it, its more of a coincidence—I have non-artist friends too, but its easy to lose track of (those) people when you're never around. The artists that I know in Rotterdam are sometimes good in their work but not personal friends. Sometimes I get along good with somebody who is not getting anywhere artistically (now that I think about it, that is probably the majority) nevertheless, I like people first and then their work later (if at all). It's a bit of an artist-thing that you happen to meet each other all the time like colleagues. If so, I find it nicer to talk about "the business" in a competitive and positive way than to complain that there's nothing happening and that the art world is unfair and elitist. Make it happen! I would say create a buzz! But, don't forget your personal goals as an artist either.

SRK: Do you find that you understand and like artworks more if you get to know the person who made the work on a personal basis?

MB: No, not really, but I would like to know more about an artist if I see works that I like (at this moment I like artists who are the opposite of me, who are creating abstract forms and interested in Rietveld and Mondrian while coming from exiting places like Israel or Mexico-city). I don't know them personally, but I find that work interesting.

SRK: You mentioned earlier in this interview that you think your artwork will become outdated in ten years time and be a *sign* of those times, since it is based in a contemporary dialogue with culture. However, what is then left over for the future is the relationship to the artist, the image of Marc Bijl as a possible cultural theorist, speaking through art interventions/sculpture. Do you think, in your interpretation of importance, that there should be more attention paid to relationship between viewer and the artist, over the viewer and the artwork? Essentially, I am asking if you choose artistic spirit over artistic object?

MB: In a way the artistic objects are the result and relics of the artistic spirit, so you need to have that state of mind first, then you can produce the works...and if you feel that inner need to actually produce it.

SRK: What are you working on at the moment?

MB: Getting interested in 80's appropriation Art and exploring the New York Goth scene. I am working on a Dutch flag piece and 20 songs about freedom for the radio.

SRK: In regards to identifying as a Dutch artist, do you see any obvious sensibilities, or "Dutch-ness" in your own work?

MB: Not really, but there should be something there, like the dry humor, relativism. And I sometimes use my Dutch-ness in an exotic way (in an art piece), but not in a socio-anthropological kind of way.

The Dutch are pre-occupied with foreigners, they like Palestinians, Israelis, Americans, Germans...especially as artists who represent their country in a cliché type of manner.

SRK: I don't ever assume that artwork can change society, and I agree with you that art doesn't directly alter politics. I do believe that all great works of art start with a subtle, or grand, influence on the individual, and that change is what makes artwork powerful. Whether artwork has the same influence as say popular culture or music is another question. I think that individuals that are looking at art do so because of the dialogue that artworks can create between artist-object-viewer. Do you think that your critique of culture and society has often led you to a critique of American culture, and now that you find yourself in America working, have your attitudes changed?

MB: No, the attitude (in general) has not changed, but my attitude towards Americans has. My work is more about symbols and I sometimes took "America" as such; never the people directly, they seem to be two different entities. I believe that America is still an European dream regarding the way so many different people live together in one nation. Unfortunately, most Americans are proud of that too and think they live in a great country.

I feel more sorry now actually for the people who have to live here (especially the ones who came to the US for a better life). Most (American) people I have met are the nicest people on earth but have to work their asses off for no opportunities (not that there are really no possibilities, but because everything here is so inefficient and multi-layered), which they take as a normal thing. And, their sons have to go to war(s) because Europeans went go. Basically, everybody is being totally fucked over and over again and they seem to enjoy it (it is part of their brainwashed idea of the American Dream). I found it really striking.

SRK: You mention how the Gothic scene influences your work and ideas as an artist, and now in New York you are also examining the sub-culture as it exists in America. I find that there are many sub-cultural groups that define themselves by a DIY attitude and have a music scene attached (punk, hip-hop, etc.), so I would like to ask you to further relate the Goth scene to your work and ideas as an artist. Or, when speaking of the Goth scene, you are really talking about the Gothic genre in art and literature from the late 18th and early 19th centuries forward (in regards to the "gothic horror" established in literature, built upon the Victorian Gothic genre, that is cited as influence to the 21st century vision of gothic in pop-culture and music)? The themes often approached in Gothic literature (that nowhere is safe, the macabre curiosity of the unimaginable, the confrontation of contemporary issues, a subversion of reality, etc.) can be attributed to some of your works, but also to many others'. How do you see these themes intertwined with your actions, your sculpture?

MB: With Goth scene I actually mean Post-Punk/deathrock music scene, but they are influenced by classic horror. I relate to it as a "cult" in which I belong(ed) and can escape to if I don't know what to do with society or art. When I take on a residency, I always have a tattoo done and make a Goth record, just to get started, and it works for me.

54 With Goth, it is an idea about a world wide connected scene (going through all

cultures and walks of life) that intrigues me, and the same idea can be found anywhere between the Bruce Springsteen's Fanclub to major religion.

I don't particularly like the contemporary "gothic art" revival in art, pop and fashion based on the Victorian Gothic scenery. It's too trendy. But I responded to that with my band, in a sculpture, and in a video-clip in CASCO, to put the emphasis on the post-punk DIY/eighties music, which was the stuff that helped me in real life. I use the "dark" escapist side of Goth as part of our daily life and as part of actual social topics in politics, which exists as an absurd counterpart within the interventions and actions, my artwork.

SRK: I can only agree with you, with your responses to Americans and the artist's life in America—I am from there, and the situation you describe was very similar in the West, in San Francisco. No matter what an American artist might say, there is an inherent "economy" to art making, to art practice, in America. There is the economy of survival as an artist, there is the economy of art production, and there is the economy of the traded artist (and by this I mean how art organizers/curators/directors pick and choose certain artists to promote and trade them and boost them to star status). These ideas are built into the education system in American art schools and continue to influence artist's work. This is not to say that American artists do not or cannot stand outside what seems a negative system, but the struggle to relate to the system, to find one's own voice, and most importantly, not lose it, is what is the heaviest burden of the American artist. But, with your ideas on America and the artists therein, do you have anything to bring back with you, as a way of thought or a way of working, to Rotterdam?

MB: Oh yes, it would be nice to have the best of both worlds: the New Yorkers and the art scene in New York are tough, but it is basically just a mantra of economics making everything connected with making money. But, in The Netherlands, that's almost suspicious—there are hardly any ambitious galleries (in the sense of being young, adventures, risky, international orientated) and artists, simply because it's (financially) not necessary for artists in Holland to operate like that to survive. You can get a long way with Basis stipendium and project subsidy grants, so why bother pursuing an international career with all the investments and risks?

In the US (or other countries), artists and galleries are more ambitious, and I like that. In New York, everyone is talking about what matters, who is hot, all this gossip—most of the time I have no clue about who or what they are talking about but it fascinates me to see the people at work here, so hard, so driven, that I feel like a lazy punk again.

In Rotterdam/Holland some artists are too fixed on local issues or in a relation with Amsterdam, as if the rest of the world doesn't exist. Even though there are a lot of international artists working in Holland, there are no stars being created. The artists I like most (my friends) are the ones that take the risk to go abroad and discover the rest of the world; it is even nicer when you meet up somewhere else than in Rotterdam. Maybe I am a bit preoccupied with this because it worked so well for me. Some artists have a more local orientation because they feel happy with that, and they make great works too!! I am not saying that artists need to be international.

SRK: Do you feel prepared, and willing, to take your artistic investigations anywhere in the World?

MB: No, not to Communist Countries (like for the Havana Biennale, for example) and not to poor countries.

SRK: Can you tell me more specifically why you wouldn't enjoy working in poor countries, or the Havana Biennial? I am curious to what stops you.

MB: I would be embarrassed and aware of my work being used for propaganda material. Social need cannot be a work of art.

I think that art comes after a good economy and education; freedom of expression is the icing on the cake (even if the icing is critical, subversive, etc). I think I cannot respond to people who struggle everyday to survive. In particular, the countries that *claim* to have a social system.

You have to learn to appreciate art as well; we know art history but they don't. I even think that artists from Palestine, Israel, India or Cuba are not excepted here (anymore) if they don't make political art; it's a new form of artistic colonialism.

The other way around (going there to "help") is a confirmation of that cultural supremacy. I would like to go there to help in a project but not a "social" project. Just a project to help making a water well or building a capitalistic system ;-).

SRK: After writing a few times about the necessity that US artists must have non-art jobs just to survive, not even taking into account the financial investment that goes into producing artwork, have you altered or changed your views regarding subsidy money or your own personal ideas of how to support yourself as a professional artist, here in Holland?

MB: Yes, I went to Berlin twice (as an artist) with enough money to provide all American artists I met with material for a year! I mean, it's a lot of money compared to other countries, so I felt obligated to do something with it. Respond to it, criticize it, etc. Its part of our "Dutch" art consciousness, but it is not a standard.

SRK: When your residency in New York is finished, do you plan on returning to Rotterdam and working from your studio here at Het Wilde Weten for some time? Or, is Marc Bijl destined to remain the mobile artist for the coming year?

MB: No, we will stay for while in Rotterdam, in 2006. But this coming year, we will be all over the globe!!



Arend Roelink

The interview was at Arend's home on January 12th, 2005, in the morning over coffee. The conversation lasted for much longer than one hour, but here you will read the most relevant discussion.

SRK: I know that you have traveled to other countries via invitation to develop artworks, so I would like to ask you to tell me more about your working process and personal art history...

Arend Roelink: I have been quite busy for three years now...in the last five years (the first two having spent in the Masters program in Enschede, which was really nice because you have a working space and time to work), and out of the context of being at the DAI in Enschede, which is an international school, you end up with a lot of contacts. This association with the people at DAI got me into an exhibit in Belgrade, Serbia called *Real Presence*. It was a gathering of over 200 art students and artists for a two-week program and exhibition. They invited me for a performance with my old companion Hannelore Houdijk, and we took the idea of “real presence” and made it into a virus. We setup at the entrance to the museum (before anyone could enter the museum), a station where we scanned everybody—we made contamination suits, I made a mobile office unit (mobile laboratory) that you could sit in, with tool storage and a database with books and clippings that hooked on the back of our car (which was how we got it to Belgrade...two days of driving, it was really nice!). We screened everybody, and of course everybody already had the Real Presence Virus (RPV) because they were at the exhibition, and we sold this little bottle of green water which was the cure called *Parasite*.

SRK: You were curing everyone?

AR: Yes, we were curing everyone. Everyone was infected by this virus. The idea for the piece was that for two weeks, people would have symptoms of hanging around the exhibit, doing things at the exhibit or just viewing the exhibit. And, we provided a medicine to cure yourself when you left the exhibition. We were only there for three days, after which we headed back to Holland. It was unfortunate because we really didn't get much contact with the rest of the program of events.

Two years later, however, I was invited again by the same organizers, where I made a piece called *Partizan*, a cardboard/mixed media sculpture that was a small scale replica of the Football Stadium that was opposite of the museum itself. For me, there are two ways of working on location: the first is you can try to address an issue that is really current and particular to the place through the artwork (having picked it up in the general vibe of the city) or, just do your regular thing in the place and see what the reaction will be.

SRK: Which one was *Parasite*, the performance based work?

AR: *Parasite* actually was a mixture of the two! It was completely arranged before hand, here in Holland, but where to place it and how to react to the people was

figured out on the spot at the exhibition—it played with communist notions that were once part of the country: standing in line, waiting for something to happen. You have to realize that there were two hundred people standing in front of us, waiting to be scanned so they could enter the exhibit—and we were really slow! Also, we used electric-gas cooking lighters as scanning devices, (because they made this rrrriicckkkk, rrrriicckkkk noise) and the people didn't know these devices! They were really shocked by the sound and the sparks! As we scanned over their bodies, they were a bit scared. I think if you made a piece like ours in Holland, people would become irritated because we delayed people from entering the museum. But the people in Serbia, probably because of having such an experience for having to wait inline, were very relaxed and just waited...

SRK: It is interesting to hear that people were on one hand disturbed by the action, by how you scanned them, and on the other, because of somehow culturally being used to lines and having to “wait your turn,” they also let you scan them and waited. I am interested in how they submitted themselves to you, in order that they could enter the museum...

AR: It was something we had not thought of before-hand. We of course knew a little about the history of the country, but this fact, the way the people lined up and reacted to us, became so present when we were there, it turned out to be shocking but also confirming to our ideas. If they didn't wait, it would have turned into chaos!

SRK: Was the *Parasite* project your first project that took you outside Holland, since you finished your studies?

AR: Yes, it was the first since my studies. While studying I had a small exhibition in Ochtrup, Germany, but that was just an old villa that we had to “dress up” with fifteen artists from the art institute. For that project, I brought along with me my project of cardboard pyramids and placed them all around the ceiling and walls (the piece consisted of twelve hundred small cardboard pyramids that are inter-locking). At the villa, I placed my work in relation to the Baroque design, using the rounded ceilings of the room to create a continuous field of pyramids that broke down the normal sense of the space. Sometimes, you really get affected by the appearance of the surrounding, the new surrounding that you work in, which is something that can happen a lot when you are traveling—although, everything is more or less the same (the appearance can be different), like between Germany, France and Italy, they still have houses but the appearance is different.

SRK: What about culture?

AR: That is something that is more interesting to work with. What I have done for the first few years as an artist is working with appearances and trying to change them. The *Partizan*, is an example of a work that took into account the cultural relationship between the people and a thing, beyond simple appearances. For *Partizan*, I flew into Belgrade, stayed for five days before returning to Holland—for this project, I had absolutely no idea what I would do when arriving. I had only a small box of tools with me. I realized, one thing I could do, was make a model of a building. All the architecture in the

city has a strong relation to the people—the Tito Museum, also called 25th of May (Tito's birthday), which was the museum for the exhibition, always was used to exhibit the art that he approved—so there is an atmosphere to the architecture, for the people. On the other side of the road from the Tito Museum is the Partizan Stadium. I was really impressed with it and thought it had a really great structure. I then tried to make a work using the stadium as a source. It turned out that the Partizan Stadium had a really negative history: Tito had used it for gymnastic celebrations for his birthday (you would have thousands of people in the stadium doing choreographed gymnastic movements for him). Since the exhibition was then in the Tito Museum, I thought there was a nice connection. At the same time, the stadium was under construction. I went to the director of the Stadium and asked him to explain a bit of the history of the place, who said that they were trying to incorporate the structure of the stadium, which had become quite political, and reshape it and give it a new meaning, give it back to the people, to make it more their stadium. It was a very important action in the social, cultural politics of the city. Through changing the structure or the shape, or giving the stadium a new front or a new roof, you can try to disconnect from the old associations you have with a building. I was interested in how an architectural structure can become an important political statement.

SRK: Because *Partizan* and *Parasite* were made in two different contexts, one was brought to a foreign place and one was created through a reaction to a foreign place, now that they are completed, which one do you think was more successful?

AR: It is hard to say which one was more successful, in the sense that with *Partizan*, it actually only existed for a few hours; the show opened on a Friday evening and on Saturday the space was rented out to another person. The performance of *Parasite* was something that happened on the spot and worked based on the reaction to the people. What I think is the bigger impact from giving or showing something to the people is the *Parasite* piece—there were two hundred people walking through the performance. I think only fifty people saw the *Partizan* work...One of the most interesting things for me as an artist traveling to different places is that I am more objective to what is going on around me; you are not so bothered by the social history of your surroundings, everything you see is a more immediate response. One of the things that I experience here in Holland, because I come from a Dutch tradition, is clearly seeing Dutch elements, Dutch ways, that exist around me. However, now that I travel so much, when I come back to Rotterdam, it feels like I am in a new town. It actually makes me feel more free as an artist, when I am in Rotterdam. I worry less about whether or not you can or can't do something there with your art. If you are making work in a foreign place for only five days, you don't think about the issues of whether it is appropriate, you just have to do it—the work is based on a reaction that reaction can be very strong! And when you come back home, you return more open minded as well.

SRK: Have you had the opportunity to stay places for longer than five days, to get more of a perspective of a place?

AR: Yes, I stayed in Singapore for a month. When I was in Belgrade, I met some people, Ian Woo and two students from Singapore. I thought it would be nice to

see Singapore, why not, so I asked Ian to send me a letter of invitation, which in the end led me to Singapore where I could stay for a month, with the responsibility of giving a few tutorials at the art institute there.

This was the first time I got out of Western culture. That was a really big blow, and Singapore is also very different to Holland in regards to censorship and the political structure. Also, the economic position of Singapore in the East, as being a very rich country, was different than I expected. There, I really had the time to get deeper into the situation of living there—I talked with some journalists, read books about the political issues (*The Air Conditioned Nation* by Cherio George)—and, you really want to take the time to get to know your surroundings better.

SRK: It sounds like your saying that traveling to other countries is part of a personal study, or a personal education as an artist.

AR: I think that traveling is important to growing up—in my family, we have a big tradition of going to Germany, France, Denmark on holiday—which is about getting in touch with alternative ways of living. I think it is important, but also something that I want to work with—I know some artists who want to work with some special kind of paint and be concentrated on canvas size, composition and color, and traveling is not necessarily going to influence their ideas—but for me, with the site-specific work that I make on different locations, traveling is very important.

SRK: Do you consider yourself a sculptor, a performance artist or a site-specific artist?

AR: If there has to be a label, I would say I make installation work within new media and video. In five years I have come to a point where I realize that I have been working with the appearance of things: architecture. Now, I want to work within a social context, to bring in the human and the appearance of the human into the work. In the past, it felt like there was something missing, that there was a next step to take. So, from last July until now, I have had this feeling to approach my art practice from a different angle, a more humanistic angle, which was also scary, because you open yourself up to a whole new range of questions. For this reason, because I was a little afraid of letting go from the past work, I decided to travel for four months in South East Asia. Since returning last November, I am now ready to flip my work around and get working, and experimenting!

I am currently working on a project in Den Bosch. I read a bit of the history of the city, took a few walks in the city, to get an idea of the place. In Den Bosch, they have this project where they move people into these Vinex locations that are old castles, well, new castles now. The “castles” are new structures—city walls with windows—and a piece of water surrounding the living area and only on entrance/exit via a bridge that goes into this “castle” living zone. I started to think about the concept of fear, and the history of the city and fear (they have a big religious history in Den Bosch, and I think that religion is very much based on fear). Den Bosch is a fortified city and historically was very important for protecting Holland from the South. Within this reaction to Den Bosch, I could react by building elements or some kind of structure to reference

the issue of fear—which is what I would normally do—but I decided to try a different angle where I am writing letters to a particular castle, Wuyvenhaerd, where I tell a bit of the history of the city, and because the person is living in the castle, I ask them why they would want to live in a castle or in a place with a certain kind of history. I want to discuss with them their personal fears. They get a letter and a SASE that they can respond to me in an easy manner. I am really curious to how they will react. If they say: ‘Fuck off, to your stupid project!’ hey, I can use that! They can say whatever they want and anonymously as well. I hope to get something back and work with whatever content is returned to me and then use it to make something in the city. It is a new and different approach for me and depends a lot on, I would say, human behavior. I find it a bit insecure...

SRK: Well, you are putting a lot of weight on the people to give a response, and that it will be something that you want to work with for generating another art piece. That is a risk you are taking, that you will actually receive useful responses.

AR: This is also something that Dijkman and Osterholt (the initiators of the project in Artis - <http://www.artisdenbosch.nl>) want to initiate; they want to give artists a place in society. They setup the context of the exhibit by saying they didn’t want a prefabricated work installed in the space, instead they titled the exhibition *Basis* and hoped for work that would take place everywhere in the city. Everywhere that the invited artists will react on the city and involve the people of the city—that is where Artis the institute will exist. If I, as the exhibiting artist, write these people a letter, than Artis, in a way, exists in their hands at that moment. I see it more or less, in regards to this letter writing project, trying to find the right approach...

A previous work, related to communication, was a large sculpture I made in both the Willem de Kooning Academy as well as in Singapore. These two places were then connected via live audio and video feed—12,000 kilometers in-between—but the two groups could communicate. The whole idea behind the project was that normally an artist works for themselves, but in the situation I created, the people in Rotterdam had to create a project for the students in Singapore to realize, and vice versa. One of the things I learned from this project is, although it technically works, the human factor is unwilling and since the people don’t know each other, they don’t have anything to talk about when facing each other via the computer screen—the conversations were very dead. People would just give little waves and ask superficial questions, like “Where are the girls?” or “Are you guys smoking pot all day?” I was really surprised about this, so I took away the video element and the sound element, and what was left was an SMS-like communication. Immediately, the communication started to boom and open-up. The anonymous element, in having contact with somebody via SMS, it allowed the whole communication aspect of the project to get started...

SRK: Do you think it was because people had to start explaining themselves in detail via text only communication?

AR: No, I think it was an issue with appearance.

SRK: You mean to say that the people communicating via video were too superficial?

AR: I mean it was as if you are sitting in front of another person, and there is some expectation that you have to do something with the situation, with the face-to-face situation. That, I think, blocked everything. Without seeing each other, or being able to see reactions or how people are dressed, if you take that away, the situation becomes more safe for yourself, a protection for yourself, an anonymous protection. When you are aware that there is a camera pointed on you and someone is watching your every move, it isn't as free as with just text.

SRK: Well, I would say that this applies directly with the letter writing project you are realizing in Den Bosch, this idea of how to best communicate and collaborate with people you don't know in any personal way...

AR: Yes. What I could do is go ring the doorbell of these people in Den Bosch and explain the project and try to have a conversation about their fears. But, I know that this wouldn't work! It is too in-your-face. So, an un-personal, personal letter is a better way to get a reaction out of the people.

SRK: What is your reaction then to changing from creating site-specific installations/sculptures to working with an idea of communication, with making artwork that is about communication as well as takes the form of communication?

AR: Let's say that the approach to making the final work has changed—the communication is becoming a first step to gathering information—and with what I get back as a response from the letters, I can still make an installation or architectonic sculpture. It's not that the project stops when I receive responses and that the project has succeeded.

One thing that I have said to myself is that I now have five years of working with architectonic sculptures and it has become a tradition for me to start new projects a certain way, to fall back into a pattern. If I really want to bring a shift in my work, to bring it to its next level or to develop it to the next level, I have to be very drastic in a change to the way I approach making the work. If I approach it from a base of communication, and I finally want to realize a sculpture from the responses to the letters I am sending, the new work can still have the architectonic, structural side, because it is still me, in the sense that it is my medium. If I approach work from a more installation-sculpture position, the idea to build an object from the start, the new work will at most have only fifty percent context of communication, which is namely what the work is addressing. Choosing to start with initiating communication or not is simply a filter I can apply to my art practice.

SRK: Is it then very important for you to control the presentation of your works? And, what does it mean to be comfortable with an ability to build a physical context in which you can present your own work?

64 AR: I like the playful element of working with moving or photographic images,

within a three-dimensional “world” one can create—you can just hang a picture on the wall or you could cut the picture up and shift it a bit and work it into an installation. I simply like building installations. But then, what are the elements for the installation? It used to be cardboard and wood and plastics, but now I am shifting into using imagery as well, from photographs to video to drawings.

There are different ways to work with materials. An example of what I like to experiment with in my work is that in many instances you find an installation with a beamer (video projector) that sits outside the installation. If you then walk around inside the installation, you eventually stand in the way of the beamer projecting onto one of the surfaces of the room. What I try to do, in my installations, is use the space that the beamer needs, which starts small at the point of the beamer and gets larger as it expands—this shape is a space—is integrate this space into the installation as an element, also just so you don’t fuck up your own image! One of the things that Arnoud Mik does which is great is he projects his images onto a screen from the back, which doesn’t present you from walking into the beam. This is a very technical thing, but when incorporating video into an installation, what do you want to do, build a white cube around the whole mechanism? Or is it something you actually want to see, to be aware of, as a formal element. In one installation I built for TENT, in a four by five meter area, I used cardboard to build a form around a monitor, but what happened was you could see the backside of the monitor quite easily, so I choose to use it as an element in the work by leaving the wires visible.

SRK: You are talking about letting go of certain rules we assume have to be followed when using technological devices in works of art?

AR: Sometimes you see a white box standing in a space, and you realize that there is a beamer hiding underneath...why are people so afraid to show the beamer? I see these things as being part of the work, part of the technique, so they should be shown. It is also something that relates to my rough way of working, where I consciously choose to show the technique—if you suddenly try to hide something when it is evident that it is there, it just shows when you are trying to fool yourself..

SRK: It also could show that an artist is trying to hide something that they do not know how to deal with...

AR: Yeah, in a way it shows uncertainty in the work. As an artist, I like the beamer, I like the video monitor—they are aspects of a work that I want to show. If you really don’t want to show it, then one should build it away so that it doesn’t disturb at all, that only leaves the viewer looking to the image or the photograph and nothing else.

SRK: I am looking at the pictures of your sculpture-installations in your portfolio, and it seems to me that you are very interested in the sculptural object—how it is made, situated and organized—but, at the same time I wouldn’t describe you as an object-maker, in the sense you make individual sculptures, paintings or multiples, things that are closed onto themselves. Your sculpture is much more looking outward from its physical existence—it takes into account the space around it and who will eventually

view it. I am interested in the relationship between how your audience experiences your work for free or by paying to get into a museum to view it, and the lacking examples of sculptural works (at least in your portfolio) that have an existence as a commodity or that can be personally collected.

AR: In my whole career, I have sold one artwork! It was a small sculpture formed by small wooden cubes, connected together, that resemble a pixilated, three-dimensional explosion. This piece comes from a site-specific wall painting I first made in De 5er, a no longer existing exhibition space in Rotterdam. The initiator of this sculpture was actually a gallery owner, who said to me that he wanted the wall painting in his gallery, but that he also was a gallery owner and there should be something, even something small, that he could sell. And I said, well, that's not what I really do! Normally, I make large installations and the institutions I work in pay for the realization of the project. But, at the same time, because I had never done something like that, actually making a single object, it was exciting to try!

I had previously come up with this idea of explosions, related to war explosions or explosions from things that go wrong, and that refer to the idea that war is becoming more impersonal, that with a joystick you can guide your rocket-bomb and it all is like pixels and computer games. So I simplified explosions—this wall-painting installation we are talking about being a simplified, pixilated image from the Challenger Space Shuttle explosion—into pixels. I then made three, random explosions using wood cubes, a three-dimensional version of a pixilated image. It was something you can hang on the wall, a real sculpture! People also recognized it as such—people who aren't educated in the arts and are used to looking at and appreciating non-art looking works—and could really relate to the objects, as they would relate to a painting, something that is hung on the wall and looked at.

This was an interesting experience for me to think about my work having a value such as this. Normally, after an installation is realized, I will keep small elements from the installation that had either a long process to create or that are small enough to store. Most of the materials are thrown away or are cut down and reused somewhere else. The whole idea of trying to preserve an installation was new to me. All my work that I have shown you in my portfolio doesn't exist anymore, except for that one piece that I said has been sold. And actually, I find it very strange!

SRK: Are you comfortable in this artistic practice in which you get paid to realize a work, and nothing more? That your artworks are physically temporary as well?

AR: The works continue to exist in documentation. Documentation is really important, maybe one of the most important parts of my process. In June or July, I will be publishing my sketchbook that includes five years of sketches. In that book of drawings is another small booklet that contains photographs of the site-specific work from the last five years. Let's say that now, this upcoming book becomes my work—it is what I have been doing over the last five years. What this means for me is that I always have to take really good photographs of my works, from all angles, etc. The documentation has to

show the strong parts of my site-specific work. I have accepted the fact that if I want to make installations, I am not able to preserve everything. And, I don't want to end up with a nice studio space stuffed with all the materials I have used over the last five years!

This is one aspect that has to do with the mobility of being able to show work in different countries like I do, I have to let go of the work in the end...

SRK: It is an interesting position to have, as an artist, to make work that has a limited physical life then only exists in documentation. Which of course is much different than making paintings and drawings, which also need to have photographs made in order to place in documentation, however, those photographs don't ever really do justice to the physicality of the painting or drawing either. While I think that it is also important for people to actually witness your works, it seems that it also isn't necessary. What I am trying to say is that the photographic documentation is actually more for capturing the conceptual power of your work over the form...

AR: This is something that will become more and more difficult in the future as I am starting to change mediums I work with, which I think will be harder to document. The films, for example, can only be seen as video stills in documentation. Yes, I could give it away as a DVD or on CD-ROM, but what happens when it is part of an installation? I could take photographs of the installation with a bit of the video component, but there is no experience of the eight minutes of film, the experience of time.

SRK: In the future, if there was an interest, a museum or institution could keep one of your installations for its collection. But, no one has given you that option yet...

This brings me to one of the themes of this issue: longevity, and within your own work. We already have been talking about it, actually. If you can do a perfect job of photographing your site-specific installations, then the work does, to a certain extent, live on in documentation. Yet, the other way of looking at your practice is that you make the work for a one-time experience and then it is over. The lifespan is of your choosing, the artwork has a finite existence that you have control over...

AR: On one hand, if you know you want to build on a big scale, you can make a decision to develop work that you can take to the exhibition or take from the exhibition, make a photograph, then you store it somewhere—with the next exhibition, you then have the opportunity to show it again. On the other hand, you can make work on the spot, but often, you can't take it with you because you have no space for it or you traveled by airplane and you cannot transport what you have made. That is my experience. I don't want to become my own museum, lets say. I don't want to keep all my works, just in order to give them the longest life possible. The work lived, on the spot, for as long as possible. How many people saw it then is how many people will see it. As a result of this, when I am offered a chance to make an installation in a future exhibition, I can make a proposal for a new work, because even if the curator has seen past works, he or she cannot say "I want that one," it simply doesn't exist anymore! It allows me to work through many ideas and keep myself open to new ways of working.

My way of working involves taking “long shots.” In the end, within a time span of a month after finishing the work, I can tell, for myself, whether the work “worked” or not. This is one of the first steps I take after finishing a piece, to understand if it worked in relation to place and to the idea. The only way to reflect on your site-specific work—where in painting you can store the painting for months after it is “finished” to tell whether you find it good or not—is only through what is left as a memory in my head and through the photographs I take.

SRK: You bring up an interesting point that I have been trying to discuss with other people in these interviews, and that is the critique of the work—critiquing site-specific work seems to be, or should be, done with a different approach than how object-oriented work. As you pointed out, your self-critique comes from looking at the work later, applying what you learn to the future, to the next installation. Therefore, whenever you are invited to make a site-specific work, or you initiate one yourself, you are, or maybe the institution is, taking on a risk that the work will manifest itself. This is the critical definition, for me, to call someone a mobile artist: the mobile artist brings the work with and is physically necessary to create a place for his or her own work.

AR: If you can cope with that kind of stress, then that’s great! As a mobile artist, you have a lot of uncertainties as well—you go to a place and you never know if it going to work or not. If you fail...I mean, the stakes get higher as you continue this way of working and go from local projects to the first foreign gallery to the museum, etc. As the stakes get higher these stakes can mentally block you. If you don’t care and say fuck it and release all the pressure, that’s great, but you still don’t now if it is going to work out in the end. Luckily, I have to say, that most of the works I have made, in the end, I was satisfied with how they existed in the place I made them. There are some things that I have made that I am not satisfied with, and actually, those works were the ones that I prefabricated and brought into an exhibition.

One of the nice things about publishing my sketchbook is you can see the similarities between work made in 1999 and work made in 2002. I like to find how certain aspects or thoughts pop-up in different works. It is one way to map how my interests have shifted over the years and how I have managed to work with certain ideas or materials. Therefore, once again, looking at my own portfolio is important to me because I have to, in order to see if an idea from one year ago is still usable today.

SRK: From looking back over your work and considering the sketches that you are going to publish, do you think that your work shows a sort of handwriting? Do you see, for yourself, an essence of Arend Roelink in the works and/or a reflection of self?

AR: Yes, definitely. First of all, I would say that colors, especially bright colors that I constantly use in my artwork—also materials, such as cardboard and wood. The work also has a scruffy, very hand-made look. There is also the architectonic reference, which is always present. In the photography and video works, there is always an element of space or feeling for space.

I can remember a period of time when I just started with the use of materials and then reached a point where I said to myself that I had to say something with the work, put my voice out there and make statements. Now, I realize that it isn't important to address the big issues, one can look at the small things, personal experiences, etc. I would say that my work is becoming more and more personal...

SRK: Which falls into your goal of being more humanistic...

AR: Yes, and with the letter-writing project for Artis, I had to think about how personal I wanted to be in the letters I wrote. I had to come to a decision about whether I would give out my cell phone number in the letter, in case people didn't want to write but still communicate with me. I mean, there could be some crazy-wacko in one of these new castle zones that would start to harass me because of the letter...

SRK: This issue, about how far does an artist open their personal life up to the audience, is at the root of being an artist who works in direct contact with the public or the public space. I have previously placed my personal cell phone number on a poster, printed in an edition of 800, and placed it throughout the city of Rotterdam over the period of one month, yet received not one single phone call, only a single SMS. The poster had a slightly distorted photograph of my face, my name and specifically asked people to call the number if they saw anyone who looked like the face on the poster! At first, I thought I would be putting myself in a position where I have given away my identity in such a public way that I might never be able to take it back...

AR: Or, maybe you just gave away your impersonal identity—living in a city, one can remain very isolated and impersonal with the people around you and just live in the background.

SRK: I think that working more directly with people in the public risks losing personal identity. Is it fair to say that an artist has a public and a personal identity, and it is their choice to push one, the other or both into the artwork? I don't know. There are works by artists where they bare their soul, and other works where through a subtle investment, the artist's soul is bared. In regards to your site-specific installations, the work can exist in a place, without a relation to you personally. You remain invisible, but your presence is evident in the work—public contact demands reaction, which is an question in the end whether the audience identifies more with the artist (physically, superficially) or with the artwork (the actions, performance, etc.). An example would be, let's say, Pipolotti Rist, who is often the main actor/subject of her own artwork—as a viewer, you have to make a decision whether you identify with her or not, and whether she as the artist allows you to forget who she is and concentrate on the work itself...the question is then whether the artist's life is the artist's artwork, or whether the artwork is the artwork...

AR: It is the situation of trying to find the balance between making a work of art, making a workshop and making a video of the process/project itself—what is the piece, what is the desired outcome?

One thing that I like, although I don't do much performance in my art but have played music in a few bands, is when you are on the stage and everyone is looking at you, it is really you! In that situation, it is far more personal, and at times scarier, than making a video of you doing the same act and presenting that. When I make video work, personally, I choose for using someone else than myself. I don't like being visually present in the work. I can relate my feeling towards art as I do film—like how when you see a film with an actor that you relate to other, previous roles and you can't get past your history with them in those other roles, so you can't except their acting in this film. It blocks you from enjoying the film or getting into the character.

SRK: Because you do not make art as individual objects, what is your reaction to artists that are working in an object-oriented manner?

AR: I need these people, and they need me as well. It is about having diversity and letting it exist. One of the questions I can remember from other interviews is being asked about amateur artists, who make little paintings and are supported by a particular commercial market and gallery system. I always say that it is their market, and they have a hand in creating and supporting another market, which is the one I circulate in. If these amateur artists were not around, making their art, then they would have to be doing something else with their lives, right? Even these two different worlds need each other. What you do is just in your nature, and I can appreciate a good painting just as much as a good installation.

I think we are really talking about two different markets: one which people want to spend a lot of money to own a piece or artwork, the other where people want to spend money to see artwork. If people really want to pay a lot of money for a piece of art, then good, it doesn't hurt me.

SRK: Well, yes, and if you are the recipient of that money, your life is going to be a little bit better!

AR: My family has pointed out to me that some artist's work sells for 80 million and how stupid that is. I say, well, if someone wants to pay that kind of money for a painting by Renoir or Chagall, then ok, fine. Actually, it has nothing to do with the painting; it is just about value, paying for an assumed value, and it really says nothing about the quality of the painting.

As long as there are still spaces left in which artists can experiment and try out new ideas, I am ok. It is very hard to find spaces in which to work—most spaces that you can have to work in are being rented, so the owner of the space has to pay rent and they need to get something out of the situation of inviting an installation artist to produce a work. Finding a space that will pay for the realization of a work without expecting something that can sell is luxurious.

70 SRK: Do you see that way of a working practice—site-specific installations and no commodity value—as a result of having studied in Holland and living in an

art system where institutions do give money to realize works without a commercial value attached to it?

AR: Definitely. I now have the luxurious situation to make artwork for the next two years because of subsidy. It is something that I also really wanted: I had taught in a high school for the last three years since my study and doing my own work on the side, which left absolutely no time for a social life or family life. Now, I have lots of time (which doesn't mean you can sit on your ass, you have to work as well) in which to really dig into the content of my work without distractions.

If you go to Belgrade or a city in Germany, and you meet artists trying to make a living, you suddenly realize how luxurious Holland is with the possibilities of subsidy. I feel very lucky to be a Dutch artist and be able to work under subsidies and grants. And, having subsidy for one or two years, you do have a time limit, so you have to make them count in those years! For me, I see it as something that really can push you as an artist. It can really motivate you.

SRK: Are you an example of a Dutch artist and what are those qualifications if you consider yourself one?

AR: I do consider myself a Dutch artist in financial reasons; that is the major relationship. Talking in "ifs..." is always difficult, but if I were a French artist, would I be making the same artwork? I don't know. I really don't know. I think in a formal aspect, in the appearance of my work, I couldn't say that it is typically Dutch work. I have been working with cardboard for five years and know I see that cardboard is suddenly popping up everywhere—it is just contemporary. All the artists that are using cardboard come from everywhere in the world. At the same time, Dutch tradition is to incorporate as much from foreign countries and try to work with a mixture of things.

SRK: Besides the financial, what about the Dutch artist as having the opportunity to work internationally and what might be the responsibilities of an artist with this luxury?

AR: Being a Dutch artist does bring some responsibilities, even if you don't want it—people see you as a representative of Dutch art when you exhibit internationally. And, you artwork often stands for an overall example: this is Dutch art, with a big stamp on your forehead! It is that you have to accept the responsibility of receiving this stamp. What I try to do is, since there are a lot of good artists in Holland, is to give people names and say investigate *that* persons artwork. One thing you have to do is give people an idea of the options in Dutch art. It always depends on how much you want to give of yourself to make connections between different circuits, like between the Dutch circuit, the German circuit, the Italian circuit, etc.

One of the things that happens is the way of working can be much easier when you are a foreigner, because it can make it easier for you to find a good space to exhibit and find good contacts. It is something about being exotic. An example is Mark Manders who, internationally, is doing very well, but in Holland, you hardly see him and

his work. Why? Apparently, he doesn't get asked! I would say, for me, I also find it more difficult to find the right places to exhibit my work in Holland than in foreign countries. It is something I have to settle for here; I am going to take it easy and see if anything pops up.

Have you had this experience when coming to Holland, seeing your work get more attention because you are American?

SRK: Well, it definitely was an issue. I was often confronted with comments that my ideas and proposals were "typical" American, in the way I looked at things. I have managed to remain busy and get offers to exhibit work, which I can't say is related to being American or not, but I am now more concerned with a recent comment that my work has adopted a bit of a Dutch sensibility to it. I think it is because I have begun a new series of work that has been developing over the period of two years which reflects my time spent in Holland...or is it just that I changed and that coincided with living in Holland? I think my work does and will reflect the environment I live in, how can it not?

AR: Is this something that you can accept, this opinion of how your work is related to place, whether objectively or not, thought of as American or Dutch?

SRK: I am mostly interested in the face value of people's reactions to my artwork. I think no matter which way you want to represent yourself—as an identity or through your artwork—it should stand outside how the work is received. This in no way means it is going to happen! I was struck by the idea that I embody a typical American viewpoint, but then I asked myself, is that wrong?

AR: Is that something you want to be associated with or want to use in your art?

SRK: Well, Dutch artists told me that being American would get me more attention as an artist in Holland, but I haven't found it to be true. I do think that Dutch curators and artists look more externally than internally in the arts, which relates to what you said earlier about Dutch artists you know being ignored in their own country.

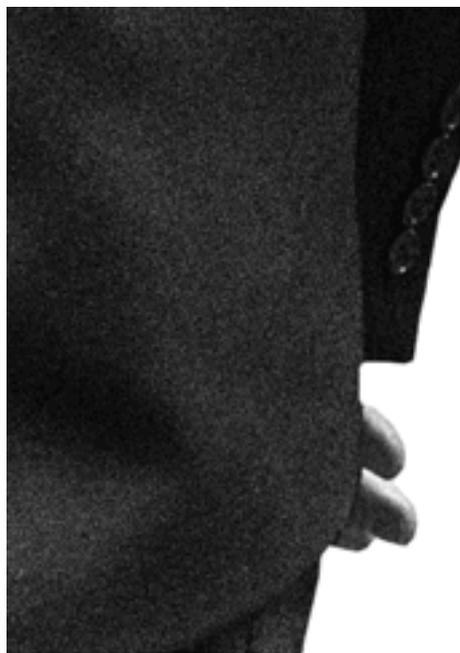
AR: Do you need then this certain feedback, the face value reaction, to satisfy *why* you make artwork?

SRK: I don't need it and I often don't get it, even with a project like *Open Issues*. While I search for a one-to-one face value reaction, what you can expect and or need always depends on what exact dialogue you want to initiate with the work itself.

AR: But isn't that then a protection that you give yourself against having a project fail? With the letter project for Artis in Den Bosch, if I don't get any reaction back, then it failed. I can always make little interruptions in people's lives, but when you don't know if you actually communicate with an audience...knowing a reaction to your work can give a satisfying feeling.

This is related to when I gave a work of art away for free: there was nothing, no return, in any shape. At least when I sold my one work, I went to the house of the person who purchased it, was able to know where it hung in their house, discuss with them what the work was about. I became friends with the people, the collector, and it became a more personal action. There was a dialogue and they told me why they appreciated the artwork.

SRK: Well, I like to think that part of being an artist is finding out how the other reacts to your artwork, and how your artwork is interpreted outside of your own interpretation. You can then agree or disagree with what the person says, but you learn from it either way. I think a problem arises when you have something to say, wish to say to a large audience, but have no vehicle in which to do so. For example, whoever reads *Open Issues* will bounce their own position, their own thoughts, against the things you and I say. And, they will either agree or not agree—what you say might confirm their own ideas, or what you say might stand so apart from them that they just dismiss you. But, the dialogue will happen...



Guide to Rotterdam Guards, details from life size, photocopy of guard's portraits, 2004

Nicoline van Harskamp

The interview was held at Nicoline's office/living room in Rotterdam, between other appointments, on February 3rd, 2005.

Nicoline van Harskamp: So, these are themes you have picked or you think we all have in common?

S.R. Kucharski: Yes, both. I find that the idea of longevity for mobile artists is something difficult to realize, an idea that the artwork will last beyond the moment it is made or after the exhibit closes, which is why I thought of your recent work.

I know in 2004 you were mostly living and working in London and developing some big projects there. But in December 2004 and January 2005 you made two shows for two major exhibition spaces in Holland, one in Den Haag and one in Amsterdam. How do you feel about spending so much time between Holland and England and how does that affect your artwork?

NvH: I think it is time to move away from both at the moment, actually. I have an idea to go to another place! In the UK there was this joke that there was once the Young British Artists (the YBA's) and now we have the YIA's, the Young International Artists...it is a cliché about young European artists moving around between countries and doing stuff, and how that is the new best thing. You know, as much as commercial galleries are connected internationally, so are art institutions, *and* the artist initiatives/art spaces that feed those institutions new artists...

Now I have an invitation from the FondsBKVK in the Netherlands to go to Berlin, to use the project studio for three months.

SRK: This idea of being the mobile artist and bringing your art practice to Finland then to Istanbul and onto London and back to Holland and now Berlin, how does this affect your work at the moment, and do you see your art work as being *able* to go from one country to another and fit or not fit?

NvH: Well, things come full circle. At the moment, I can't say which came first, the international opportunities and projects or the way I live and work, as an artist. The Guards projects, they are based on different cities and it moves from city to city. It is a project in which I can say something about a city. It could be a concept that for the next twenty years and in as many cities as I can, I make a Guards project and just keep it going. But, honestly, I am not going to spend the next twenty years making Guards projects!

Something I have always done is that I make artwork for a certain place, in a certain context, and that can be for a city. I don't believe in national identities, but instead the concept of a city, which I think is something that one can truly understand, and in a rather small amount of time. I feel that if I spent a month in a city, like say Paris, I can then actually have something to say about that city, and be *allowed* to

say something about that city. If I were to travel the whole of France in one month, and then try to make a statement about France, it would be impossible. This is why national identities are hard to conceive and are difficult things.

I would say I have to live somewhere in order to make a work about it. And, to be in a way that I can grasp, it is limited to the scale of a city.

So, this last year altogether, I did pieces in London, Glasgow, Rotterdam, Den Haag and Amsterdam. I see each of these cities as a specifically different place, and I wouldn't say that I have been in the UK and in the Netherlands and try to push an idea that I said something about the larger national identity.

SRK: And the people in each of these cities probably also think of their cities as a unique place as well.

NvH: Yes, I guess they are, especially if you look at local things like security guards. For example, I think there is a massive difference between guards in Rotterdam versus guards in Den Haag, two cities in the Netherlands. Den Haag is much more international than the other cities. I know it sounds weird but it's where the diplomats are, where the international bodyguards are, and it is where all the Queen's security is. You wouldn't normally think about it, but...

SRK: I guess one might think of Amsterdam when thinking internationally because of all the foreign workers and tourists...

NvH: But, its not. Amsterdam is super local, and really small in terms of guarding and organization.

SRK: You said that your work is about responding to a city, or that you make work on how you experience the city...

NvH: No, it has to do with where it is and whoever invites me to do something, the specific situation—I don't make things in Rotterdam in advance and/or then place them somewhere else.

SRK: But, you also aren't dependent on going to a new place in order to develop a new piece, right?

NvH: Not necessarily, but it is related to economics, because going to a new place funds the creation of the work. If I go to Berlin, then I can make a *new* project.

SRK: Well, it seems you can't remove one from the other, this idea of making work about a city and then about having a *relation* to a city...

76 NvH: That is something that I have always done, the way I want to work and it takes different shapes. So, recently, it took the shape of this Guards project, in

books and videos.

SRK: In Finland, you hadn't created the Guards project yet. But, your work was, even then, about using video or other means to interact with people in the public. And, it seems the Guards project just took off, for you as an artist, and you found different ways of expanding it to reflect a new place.

NvH: That's right. That is also because I got some opportunities with the Guards projects that allowed me to keep working on it as an ongoing project. An example is being a participant in the Beck's Futures award in London, which took me to a whole different level in the art world. And, when as an artist you start working for larger institutions, you can get a lot more done by using their resources and reputation. Being involved with these institutions becomes a big part of any public project, as the institutions are often linked to the city. If you then make artwork about the city, through the institution, you have more opportunities.

Working in all the different cities does seem to be related. I recently went to my show in Den Haag with someone who is also familiar with the work I did at ESPOO in Finland, and from her opinion it seems my process has come full circle (related to process and aesthetics), from ESPOO to the show in Den Haag, except that the work has taken on a different level and a different form. I always thought that this new series of projects, the Guards, started in Istanbul, but now I can also see how the process really got started in Finland.

SRK: That is nice, to look back over the period of two years and trace back your process, to see you just didn't go to a city, make a work and then drop it, move on to another city and start again...

The label of mobile artist is referencing that the artist needs to be there to install the work/make the work. The idea of a mobile artist defines your practice of relating to cities and using the experience in your work. Which is different to being a transnational artist, someone who moves across borders and brings their work that is about being from another nation or culture. In your work I don't associate it being Dutch work, and you yourself said that you don't believe in the idea of national identity, however, do you ever get comments about being Dutch, where you come from and how that is evident in the art pieces?

NvH: In the UK it is often thought that my work is Dutch work because it has a slight disrespect for the commercial side of art. That is something that comes from the luxury of being Dutch and having reasonable security about getting funding in order to realize projects.

In the UK there is a lot of art that is made for selling, where in Holland there is a whole other idea that art is something that can shape society and holds onto the idea that art is more than a commercial object—essentially, you don't have to justify making it by the artworks capacity to sell, you can justify it by its social reference. This

is quite normal in the Netherlands, I think. It is not something I feel I have to explain to people in the Netherlands, and it is something that directly influences the way I work.

It has taken me years to realize that I should *maybe* work on making exhibitions in the normal, gallery sense. For me, making booklets, setting up a web site and organizing presentations is no problem, making documentation to get funding is all good, but to show work and “fill a space...?” I don’t really enjoy this *hanging* of the work in a space. It isn’t part of the core of my work to present it in a traditional gallery/exhibition way.

And then there is this link with design. I think a lot of people would think what I do as an artist is related to journalism or design. People who were associated with the Beck’s Futures prize suggested that I find a publisher.

I also think that there is an annoying thing about Dutch-ness which is a certain misplaced self-confidence and an idea that we do things the *right way*. I see this attitude in myself a little bit...

SRK: Do you think there is a limit to being a mobile artist? Like with artists like you who are working inside and outside Holland, who are being funded both privately and through state-funds.

NvH: I really don’t feel like I am taking very many risks, because I am still only moving around in the art world. And the art world stretches really far. I suppose that even if I went far away, to Venezuela as an example, I would most likely go to some artist group or small museum to develop a project. The art-institution network is quite a big network that stretches all over the world. For me and my work, it would be quite odd to step outside of that network, for example, like going into publishing as an artist. I think that would be hard.

I am still safely within the boundaries of this big art network, a network that allows me to do what I am doing. I am not inventing things that are new, I am just finding my own way through this network that has existed for a long time and is always growing.

SRK: No one before has brought this up, like you saying that the artwork is very extensive and as an artist you can go all over the world and still remain within a closed track. And, this idea that if you stepped out of the track, what would you do? How would you continue to make artwork and continue to survive?

NvH: I mean to say, going to an art-space in Venezuela or to a commercial publisher in London, which one would be more alien? It is just a comparison. But, I continue to think I should *use* this art network while it is there...

SRK: Well, it is quite fantastic to get invitations to move around and make artwork for all sorts of different groups. I am assuming that you have not only applied to groups/institutions to make artwork, but that you have had invitations fall into your lap.

NvH: Yes, it is great! But, I also have a certain direction that I trying to steer myself in. I have an idea of what I want to do, and this falls in line with working with institutions in cities.

Related to your idea of the interstellar artist and how far can one go, I now think I should use the art network as far as I can. I do keep my own agenda within the artwork and try to make the work be about something in particular. But, I also assume that people understand this in the art world. So I am trying to talk to all groups, those in art and those outside the art world. This is also why my work is often about cities, because as with the Guards project, you can see the differences between guards, but seeing the work as a whole one can find the *similarities* as well, what the cities have in common, what systems are in common. There has been an ongoing exchange between the cities and between the projects that echoes into new projects, and is in relation to the content of the work. I think of it as a reverb, and when you see your work reverb-ing you know that it is somehow working!

SRK: That is interesting because here you have the case where you started the project in Istanbul and you could have just made the Guards project a one-off. But, you didn't. You did it again and again, and while some people might think you are repeating yourself, it is comparable to a more traditional way of art making where work in painting or video is made in a large series.

NvH: Well, it is a collection of collections, but by now, in terms of individual artistic value, I could hire someone to make me a guards project, because I know exactly where they should go, how they can arrange the material, etc...I can now actually instruct someone to make one! And, that is a concept, also. I mean to say that in my own work I need to progress, but at the same time it still makes sense to come to some fully realized conclusion to the Guards project. Which now I think I have accomplished. I have also made other non-guards related work during the last two years, which is important to note.

SRK: I am surprised to hear all this because I didn't come into this interview with the idea that your working process functions in a very business-like way, where you have deadlines, agendas and ideas that need producing in the form of books, web design and visual support materials. Which is not what art making is supposed to be. So the question is also, why don't artists use the business more as a model for producing artwork?

NvH: Well, I can say I would really like to get paid by the hour! I have now started to hire people to help me produce the artwork (cutting out figures and some of the filming of the work has been done by hired help). Sometimes this is necessary because I am not around in order to do everything myself. It is great to have the ability to get this sort of help, but actually it doesn't really lessen the time it takes to make the artwork, in the end. I am still working a lot.

SRK: Let's talk about the theme of art and ideas as public property, or the idea of giving art away for free. After being in Holland over the last three years, I noticed

that a result of the funding that is provided to Dutch artists by the government is that an artist can make artwork and distribute it without worrying, specifically, for a financial return. An example being your first Guards booklet, *A Guide to Istanbul Guards*, which you produced last year and was floating around Rotterdam as a free object just like *Open Issues* was at the same time. And, the Guards booklet was the project...I am interested in this freedom of producing objects and giving them away, whether or not it is publicly or privately funded. And, I am interested in the idea that once placed in the public, it is something that doesn't belong to you anymore—it belongs to the person who decides to pick it up and take it home. How does your current work and past work reflect this decision to produce and distribute for free to the public?

NvH: The booklet *was* the result from the project from when I was in Istanbul. It was the product of the time I spent at the residency at Platform Garanti Istanbul Residency Program.

I feel we already covered some of what your asking when I said I have to now think about exhibitions and spaces, to now think of my work existing inside the gallery. It is not only wanting to spread my work publicly; it is simply how I *started* as an artist. It has always been an interest of mine, to work publicly. I was never interested in making pieces or objects for spaces or putting them in spaces and then selling them. I come from a design and activist background, not an artistic one. Since I started with this background, the easiest way for me to create a voice for myself was to work from this background, to work from an idea of spreading your idea around as widely and accessibly as possible.

SRK: Did your early distributions of materials, related to art projects, start off without responses? Do you think people noticed their was an artist behind these public manifestations/actions/booklets?

NvH: The booklets are not promotion for me, they are what they are, which is the artwork. With the Beck's Futures prize, the organizers asked me why my name wasn't on the cover of the Guards booklet I made in London. Well, my name is in it, but the booklet isn't about me. I already feel weird about printing my name ten thousand times, because it was an edition of ten thousand booklets. To me, working with booklets feels like any other medium. And again, I feel like there are enough people who understand this about me as an artist. Yes, there is this background experience to "spread the word" about my work. It is based on a DIY culture, where you make your own flyers. This is something that I have done myself since I was six or seven years old. I used to make my own newspapers! Things like mail art, which I have done for years and years and years. My current work, the way I work, all stems from this experience and interest that I have built up. And, in the last years, I suddenly found there was space for these actions in visual art, so I took it.

Then there were projects in London that I have done on-site as well, work I did for counsels and other local organizations. We would produce posters about what was being done and asking people to get in touch with us, which was a great way to get people involved

80 with the projects. It is part of my process to work very quickly, which comes out

of the copy-machine aesthetic, which is a bit low quality but fast and efficient.

I have been returning to the neighborhood poster board aesthetics and the newspaper aesthetics, which I am very, very interested in. Things like hand-painted shop signs. I have a nice collection of hand-painted graphic design from everywhere I have been! I believe that everyone makes drawings, makes abstractions such as routes or a map. This idea of drawing is so common, so democratic. It is also like making flyers for parties, which is so affordable. I know I am not the only one doing it, like you are making this project *Open Issues* or the monthly *Little Memo* by Peter and Zeeloot. I know there are differences between each publication, but on the whole it is related and there is an attitude behind it. With cheap production you realize you *can* make something, and you are allowed to make it—you don't need to justify it. So, that is what I do with the Guards booklets, where I can make anything from a clumsily printed collection of images to a high-end 4-color book.

SRK: I think it is really important what you saying, that you have developed an aesthetic over your lifetime for the work you make, even if your work itself isn't about aesthetics, necessarily.

NvH: The aesthetics in my work, I think, is what keeps everything together. It might sound stupid, but even the way I cut video is similar to this cut-out aesthetic that I have used for a long time now.

In *De Appel*, I decided to make these large prints, which are related to the large cut-outs I have been making in the past, like what you might have seen in Rotterdam at the Witte de With and Tent *Tracer* show. For *De Appel*, I made prints of young adults in security-like uniforms I had made for them and their portraits, wearing this gear, is the photographic prints that are hanging on the wall. It might look more professionally produced, but basically it is the same thing: you take a picture, print it, cut around it and then hang it up on the wall!

SRK: From talking to you and other people who are working in a very mobile way as artists, everyone says how they are not making very much money at all from this career. There isn't a return from this type of work, which is different from making work and showing it in a commercial gallery. Being a mobile artist is just one way of sustaining your life, making your artwork and moving on from place to place.

NvH: I feel that I have a lot of freedom and opportunities because of the way I work. It is a perfect way to see the world as well. To be honest, I have never wanted to have a job, in the traditional sense of a job. Which, is one of the reasons I wanted to be an artist, which was the only way I could imagine having a job.

SRK: Although, you probably work more hours than a normal job holding person does!

NvH: Yes I do. Of course, I did have many jobs in order to get by, but never a full nine-to-five sort of job. And, I would like to keep it that way.

SRK: Do you feel like your investment in your work and the art world is really outside the normal job, daily routine way of life?

NvH: No not really. I think it is healthy for me, that in the work I do it is a process that I work on everyday. I don't wait around for inspiration, like with the traditional idea of an artist. With my work it is a different process: I get a new situation or new opportunity and I think it over then start building the work. It isn't waiting about the "right moment" in which to produce something. I guess I don't *really* fall far out of the normal working process!

SRK: Do you think that the way you produce artwork or the genre you work in influences what you interested in looking at in the art world?

NvH: You mean colleagues? Of course, I am very interested in what other artists are making who have similar ideas as myself. But, I am not dis-liking artwork that isn't doing what I am trying to do. It is simply that I don't want to make that kind of artwork.

SRK: In America, you find situations where artists are so dedicated to their medium or genre, that they really push that forward and over other types/ways of working in art. And, they can sometimes make very convincing arguments of working in this or that manner over all other ways. In order to reach an agenda...

NvH: Well, I think I just said that I believe there is enough space for everyone to work within their own agendas and through different mediums in the arts. However, I *would* like people to try different things...

SRK: Let's then talk about the last theme, an idea of longevity in your work. You have said that you are now thinking about an idea of exhibitions and gallery spaces, which is more about making objects that last *outside* the project or investigation you make in a city. Maybe you can talk a bit about having/not having that as a focus in your work?

NvH: Well, what I think about now is how this year some of my work has been catalogued, so once it is catalogued, it is *somewhere* permanent, isn't it? People warn me and it probably isn't good, but if nothing stays behind, as in no lasting object related to my projects, then so be it. Four years ago, I also did things that no one saw and no one will see again, but it exists in my documentation. Things I do now, you might not see them in person, but they exist in catalogues, somewhere, or in an article. And, people are keeping copies of the Guards booklets in their toilet, which is kinda' funny, you have to admit. So be it! I mean to say that I don't hold any rules about how people are supposed to encounter my work.

Actually, I just don't care. I really don't care, about this idea of preservation. I know from myself that I have found inspiration from works that I saw in books and catalogues, so for me to have my own work in that format, then I think it will continue to reach people after the installation has come down and I throw all the actual objects away. I don't think it is therefore necessary to have something that can be hung on the wall, etc.

An example is a feeling I had this week when I heard that Johan Grimonprez was giving a talk at the IFFR in Rotterdam, the guy who made the film *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. It is a film that was first shown in Documenta X in 1998 or so, and I remember seeing it there and it really knocked me out. I have seen it so many times since then. It is a film about plane hijacking, in a sort of cut-and-paste style. That film really changed what I then thought I was allowed to do as an artist. So, eight years later, I am sitting in the Film Festival listening to him! In this case, for me it proves that works stay around for as long as they are relevant, and here we see Grimonprez' film still used and relevant today as it was eight years ago.

In this the "information age," things don't live on because of their physicality but because of who sees it and what people do with it.

SRK: I think this is an interesting position you take, because for myself, coming from a drawing and painting background, where I was taught how to make my paintings last for five hundred years or longer, there was a lot of weight put behind an idea that the art object never changes and forever exists in "one way" in order to be experienced by all. Which is very opposite to work based on projects, temporary exhibitions and ephemeral pieces such as flyers, booklets, etc. And, where the artwork lives only through documentation and the occasional article.

NvH: I really never consider any of those issues you just mentioned in relation to my own artwork. I never had to make these choices either.

SRK: Do you ever feel sorry that people then have missed your exhibitions, knowing full well that they will most likely never see the work presented in that particular way again?

NvH: Yes, of course. Immediately after making the exhibition or the work, I have to make sure that I contact people in order to get them to come and visit the exhibition. I have learned over time to be much easier with this idea that people *have* to see the work. With the Beck's Futures prize, much that was written about the exhibition was written on the Internet, and by the time the actual exhibition was over, these online articles had disappeared, without me having a chance to save them properly. I can however say that the booklets recycle well.

SRK: The reason why I ask the question about longevity and whether artists think about their work outlasting their own lives is because I am interested in what happens to artists and the viewers of art within an idea that artwork is physically less important than its relativism or its conceptual importance, and whether its reproduction in catalogues, documentation, etc. is all we really need with artwork these days in order to understand it or to *have* it...I know from experience that when one is used to seeing a work of art in an art history book and one day you come across the actual work in a museum, you often have a shocking experience between the personal concept of the art piece and its real form...

NvH: Yes, and you can be quite impressed...

SRK: Yes, and I am concerned about what this means when works of art only exist forevermore in documentation. Granted, documentation can support conceptual work and actions quite well, but I am talking about all works of art. Somehow, I think this is something that artists and art viewers have to come to terms with in the future, to have had such an ephemeral career and have only a trail of paper behind all their diverse activities as artists.

NvH: Well, in that way, artworks you describe that are “nonexistent” are similar to theater plays or music.

SRK: True, but, let’s compare it then to how people look fondly back upon moments when they saw some band, live in a concert in the seventies, and they hold onto that gig poster as a reminder of the feelings that once were. Do you know what I mean? It’s that little thing that reminds them of a particular place and time, something that can reignite those buried memories and reminds you how you read/saw/participated in something important. And now, this interview will also be a record of some place in time that we were able to discuss your current position as an artist. Someday we will have to catch up and see what is similar and what has changed.

NOTES:

THE THEMES:

Giving it away for free—art and ideas as public property, the Mobile, Transnational and Interstellar Artist and the wish for longevity (and in your own work).

THE PROJECT:

This project is about discussions, with artists, about art, recorded within one hours time. Here then is a collection of conversations, partially based on the artist's work, but also on themes, with an idea to put all the interviews together, showing the different voices, but maybe also showing that they share some same perspective, and that these methods and creative processes are things I think are important to Rotterdam, the Netherlands, as well as important to all artists in relation to contemporary art practice. The zine is called *Open Issues*, because that is how I feel about these conversations—we aren't giving you a set of answers or solutions to the themes, only showing you that there are some out there...

Open Issues, a product of Tomorrowism: sustainability, engagement, a focus beyond reduction, a wish to improve upon common knowledge by understanding the past or the root of knowledge—a need to understand today's *desire* of tomorrow.

Authored by S.R. Kucharski and the artists interviewed herein. Cover design by Freya van Dien and SRK. Thank you to all the artists who contributed their time to this issue!

Met dank aan:



**For questions, comments or suggestions, email:
info@tomorrowism.tk**

Fast Prototyping the Link Challenge

Systematic collection devices
Creating fictions of ourselves
What counts as information?
And what doesn't count
as information?
As if the Dow Jones Industrial Average
represents the loss.

Media-based arts
Inherent research
Looking for answers
Painting still has magic I say

New public media space
Hardware association
Inherence of video and audio from the Fine Arts tradition
Editorial logic
Not that time
Not this time
It has a lot to do with...
Granularity

It all looks like information to me
Open ended formats, versus
Closed scientific genres
As a forum for art

A stealth transmission
That's what I say
...or what I said
A burgeoning battery of
Historical-retro figures
Don't forget festivals, and
Power hungry hippocrites

How to Remain the Same
After the process of thinking
And before the process of using
The New Subjectivity born of the Third Millennium