

Annual report Socrates Foundation 2022-2023 by Erik Rietveld

Socrates Chair University of Twente (UT), Dept. of Philosophy: Making Humane Technologies
In Dutch: “Filosofische reflectie op ontwerpen en maatschappelijk inbedden van technologie, met bijzondere aandacht voor humanisme.”

Introduction

The two highlights of the year 2022-2023 were 1.) that my brother Ronald Rietveld and I (RAAAF) have won the Global Award for Sustainable Architecture under the Patronage of UNESCO. It was awarded for our art-based experimental approach. And 2.) that the journal *Adaptive Behavior* published an entire special issue on my inaugural lecture as Socrates Professor, *The Affordances of Art for Making Technologies*, with responses of many key figures in my field, including former Socrates Professors Annemarie Mol and Jeannette Pols.

My activities in 2022-2023 have focused on the relationship between imagining possible futures in turbulent times, the process of designing/making, and *an investigative humanism* that explores aspects of the good life in an imaginative way. I have been exploring this both non-discursively by means of new artworks (with RAAAF) as well as discursively via teaching and several publications.

With the start of my new VICI project “Change-Ability for a World in Flux”, I have added that topic as a new research line to the work for my Socrates Professorship. The aim is to sketch a new integrative perspective on what I call change-ability. I define change-ability as skilled ways of coordinating with a rapidly changing world. Many urgent societal challenges – from climate change to obesity, from the mass extinction of species to fraying social cohesion – require people to collectively change everyday patterns of behaviour they take for granted. The key insight I start from is that to durably change undesirable patterns of behaviour, we could start by changing the affordances the environment offers – the possibilities for action offered to us by the living environment. Moreover, given the impact of the war in Ukraine on both society and the practice of RAAAF (with an inhouse Ukrainian artist and architect), I decided to continue a new line of research, started during Covid-19, for exploring if and how art is able to contribute to people’s dealing with forms of loss and grief.

This makes my four line of research as follows:

- (1) Humane computational models of the anticipating brain.
- (2) Change-Ability for a World in Flux.
- (3) The role of imagination in visual art and architecture for explorations of the good life of the future, societal embedding of new technologies, and initiating transformations of existing practices.
- (4) Art in Grief.

Teaching

To link the design of technology to humanism and society, my teaching activities focused on the following theme: *The Affordances of Art for Making and Embedding Technologies*. I translated insights from my inaugural lecture into a teaching program for 2022-2023. The emphasis was placed on demonstrating that the skills that are characteristic of the practice of making visual art are also relevant for better embedding technology in society. The three skills I explored in particular were: 1. The skill of working with layers of meaning and developing a sensitivity to what an intervention means for the lives of people and different socio-cultural practices.

2. The skill of making “material playgrounds” so that interventions on the scale of the experiencing body can be tested and the pleasure of experimenting is given full scope.
3. The skill of being open to the possibility of radically changing established practices.

In line with my **situated approach to cognition**, I have further developed the RAAAF Road Trip as on-site teaching program for students. In addition I have now also included a teach-the-teacher group so that researchers who teach can learn from this approach. In RAAAF Road Trips we have visited the artworks Bunker 599, Still Life and Deltawerk //. I have in 2022-2023 again organized several RAAAF Road Trips: for students, teachers, artists, researchers, and general public interested in visiting RAAAF’s artworks.

I organized a workshop in March 2023 for those interested in humane approaches to AI in order to reflect on the opportunities and challenges posed by generative AI. We invited a representative of Stability AI and used RAAAF’s design process as a case study to make things concrete.

I have been teaching at two Socrates Summer Schools: in 2022 the Socrates Summer School 2022 on the topic of Art in Grief (together with Geerteke van Lierop). In 2023 I organized a walking seminar at the Socrates Summer School, focusing on that event’s central book “Machiavelli’s left”. Due a pneumonia of Geerteke van Lierop, a scheduled Art in Grief theater lecture (theater college) on the U Twente campus had to be postponed unfortunately.

Due to illness of the course coordinator, the teaching I would do for one of the Honours Programs and ATLAS at the UT was postponed by them as well.

Finally, I have represented the University of Twente by lecturing again at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts & Sciences (KNAW) on aspects of my inaugural lecture as Socrates Professor. Together with other members of the KNAW, I was involved in a working group that is exploring how we could contribute to (the awareness of) the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN (this is what actually inspired my VICI project on Change-Ability and the art installation Black Water, see below). At the Universities of Amsterdam (Brain & Cognition), Madrid, Odense (SDU), Vancouver (UBC), Venice, the Paris and Amsterdam Institutes of Advanced Studies, and the Department of Psychiatry at the Amsterdam UMC I was given the opportunity to present to (PhD students) parts of the content of my inaugural lecture for the Socrates Chair, and my most recent work on Making Humane Technologies.

Research

Research line 1: Humane computational models of the anticipating brain

Happiness, flourishing and neurodynamics. In our work on theoretical neurobiology we have shown that the intrinsic anticipatory dynamics of the brain are best understood in relation to the rich landscape of affordances provided by our social, cultural, material and natural living environment. In 2022-2023 we have focused developing insight in the relationship between neurodynamics and the important topics of happiness and human flourishing:

- Miller, M., Kiverstein, J., & Rietveld, E. (2021). The Predictive Dynamics of Happiness and Well-Being. *Emotion Review*. 2022;14(1):15-30. doi:10.1177/17540739211063851

Research line 2: Change-Ability for a World in Flux

The Change-Ability VICI research project is relevant for (eco-)humanism in that it “decenters” the individual to do justice to communities and their sociomaterial dynamics. Crucially it situates both

individuals and communities in the **ecological niche** that they share. Both human beings and other living beings share a responsiveness to the possibilities (affordances) that the ecological niche offers. The journal *Adaptive Behavior* published a special issue on my inaugural lecture *The Affordances of Art for Making Technologies* with responses of many key figures in my field, including Tim Ingold, Martin Stokhof and former Socrates Professors Annemarie Mol and Jeannette Pols. Read more here: <https://erikrietveld.com/2023/07/13/adaptive-behavior-special-issue/>

We published several papers related to the Change-Ability project:

- Rietveld, E. (2022). Change-Ability for a World in Flux. *Adaptive Behavior*. doi: 10.1177/10597123221133869
- Rietveld, E. & Kiverstein, J. (2022). Reflections on the genre of philosophical art installations. *Adaptive Behavior*. doi: 10.1177/1059712321989428
- Rietveld, E. (2022). The affordances of art for making technologies. *Adaptive Behavior*. doi: 10.1177/10597123221132898
- Novak, A., Van Lierop, G., & Rietveld, E. (2022). Engaging with art skillfully. First steps towards an ecological-enactive account of the experience of art. *Adaptive Behavior*. doi: 10.1177/10597123221133

Furthermore, interviews with RAAAF on the process of making were published in the *Journal of Architecture* and in a new book *Collaborative Embodied Performance: Ecologies of Skill* (edited by Kath Bicknell & John Sutton):

- Staničić, A. & Jelić, A. (2022). Designing affordances of future heritage: a conversation with Ronald and Erik Rietveld of RAAAF. *The Journal of Architecture*, 27:4, 594-614. doi: 10.1080/13602365.2022.2132770
- Martens, J., Rietveld, R., & Rietveld, E. (2022). A conversation on collaborative embodied engagement in making art and architecture: Going beyond the divide between ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ cognition. In K. Bicknell & J. Sutton (Eds.) *Collaborative Embodied Performance: Ecologies of Skill* (pp. 53–68). London, Methuen Drama.

And finally, we published two book chapters. One on “Embodied Making” in Bol & Spary’s *The Matter of Mimesis*, and the other an interview with Harry Heft in Segundo-Ortin, Heras-Escribano’s new book on *Ecological Psychology*:

- Rietveld, E. (2023). Embodied Making. In M. Bol & E. Spary (Eds.) *The Matter of Mimesis* (pp. 445–469). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. doi: 10.1163/9789004515413_023
- Rietveld, E., & Kiverstein, J. (2023). Reflections on ecological psychology: An interview with Harry Heft. In M. Segundo-Ortin, M. Heras-Escribano, & V. Raja (Eds.) *Places, Sociality, and Ecological Psychology: Essays in Honor of Harry Heft (1st ed.)* (pp. 10-22). Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781003259244

Research line 3: Imagination for exploring the good life of the future

In line with the humanist (HV) theme “**inspiration for life**”, this research line uses artworks and art-science research projects to explore, with an open mind, the good life of the future. Such explorations can be seen as finding ways to move beyond taken for granted (and sometimes centuries old) traditions when the situation requires that; for example, due to urgent societal issues from climate change, to socially disruptive technologies, the pandemic, obesity, and extinction of species.



RAAAF's artwork Black Water was nominated for **Amsterdam Art Award 2022** by the Amsterdam's Fund for the Arts (AFK) in the category "Work of the Year". With the installation Black Water, RAAAF once again points to the unique hidden qualities and potential of 10.000 vacant public buildings in the Netherlands, presented in the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2010. NRC's art critic Hans den Hartog Jager named Black Water one of the year's best artworks internationally.

Nice news on this line is also that our book *The Landscape of Affordances*, which was launched at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, KNAW, on the techniques, materials and crafts involved in the process of making RAAAF's site-specific art installations, which are materialized visions and explorations of possible new worlds (together with Ronald Rietveld), has won the **Best Dutch Book Design Award** and has been exhibited at the **Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam** and the Tokyo Printing Museum, amongst others.



Image: Cover of The Landscape of Affordances, a philosophy book disguised as an artists' book

Furthermore, with RAAAF, Peter-Paul Verbeek, the U Twente art committee, staff and student representatives we explored the possibilities of building an End of Sitting style art installation the Design Lab space of the U Twente. There was wide-spread enthusiasm for such an intervention there, but the DesignLab was not able to secure sufficient funding and when Peter-Paul left the U Twente the momentum for this project left as well unfortunately.

We have developed an artwork proposal for UNESCO's monument of engineering the Plofsluis, part of the New Dutch Waterline. This made it to the final round of the selection process but was in the end not selected.

As mentioned in the introduction, my brother Ronald Rietveld and I have won the 2023 Global Award for Sustainable Architecture under the Patronage of UNESCO. It was awarded for our art-based, experimental approach. You can read the U Twente press release here:

<https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/news/2023/10/1186191/global-award-for-sustainable-architecture-for-erik-rietveld-raaaf>

Website Global Award: <https://globalawardforsustainablearchitecture.com/>

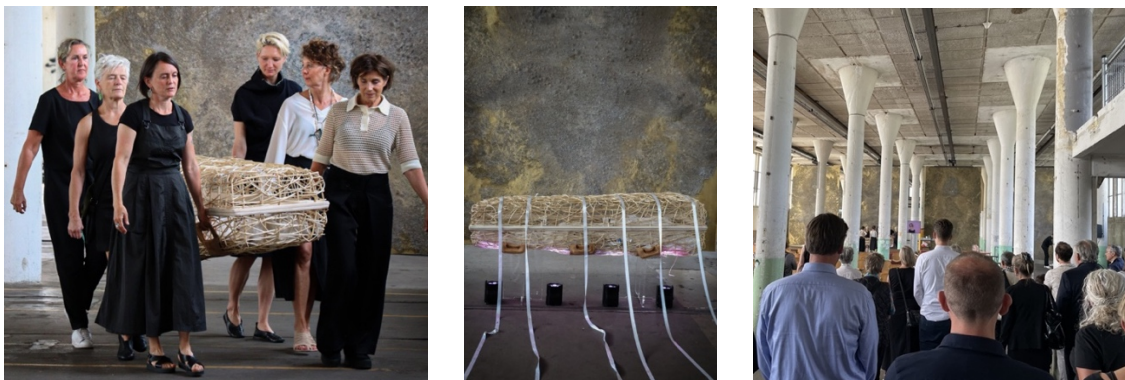
Together HV-director Robbert Bodegraven the HV's eco-humanism program director we have started exploring possibilities for an eco-humanistic artwork.

A note on lingering Covid-19 impact in 2022-2023:

The pandemic had a very negative impact on RAAAF's project *Trusted Strangers/New Amsterdam Park*. After 11 years of preparation we were planning to realize a 100-meter long test in the river IJ in Amsterdam in summer during Sail 2020 (in collaboration with The Port of Amsterdam, NDSM, The Mondriaan Fund for Visual Art, and BPD). Unfortunately, Sail 2020 got cancelled and so did our large test. In 2022-2023 we have continued working on this with the ambition to realize the test in 2025 when Amsterdam celebrates its 750th birthday.

Research line 4: Art in Grief.

How can art in a turbulent time of loss allow people to experience meaningful connection at the right time—when it can make a difference in their lives? The various societal crises and changes bring losses to people, and can make some feel overwhelmed. People tend to disengage when meaningful change seems impossible to them. In this project we seek to learn from the role of **art in grief** how, when because of loss people disengage from the world, they can be invited to re-engage.



Images: Funeral ceremony in RAAAF's art installation Still Life.

For example, our installation *Still Life* has since 2022 spontaneously become a setting for funeral services (see Figure 8), while *Deltawerk //* and *Bunker 599* have become part of grief expert Geerteke van Lierop's audio-tour for people suffering unexpected loss.

We have set up a collaboration with Hanneke van Laarhoven, an oncologist at Amsterdam UMC who explores the meaning that art can bring to in the final stages of the life of terminal cancer patients. She is interested in researching the potential of the Art in Grief audio tour and in bringing her patients to RAAAF's Bunker 599.

Together with Geerteke van Lierop we have presented our work on Art in Grief in several art institutions, hospices and University Medical Centers. We actively encourage empirical researchers to set up research projects around the Art in Grief project to explore the potential of art in dealing with profound change.